Lake Warner, aka the North Hadley Mill Pond, is a shallow 68 acre man-made lake located in the Village of North Hadley, Massachusetts (National Register of Historic Places Site No.420740).  It conforms to the North side of Mt. Warner, a monadnock, which was an island when the Connecticut River Valley was inundated by glacial Lake Hitchcock some 14,000 years ago. The lake is totally artificial and exists only because of a dam across the Mill River.  The surrounding area was originally forest, swampy wetlands and perhaps a few natural or Native American made meadows. Today it is comprised of forest and farmland.  The area has Native American archeological sites dating back a thousand years.  Archaeologist Mitch Mulholland created a map of the area surrounding Lake Warner and stated “The shaded regions are those that should be left undisturbed due to the high historical value of Native American Archeological sites".

The area is still comprised of the scenic vistas, working farms and orchards and historic buildings that characterized this area when it was settled by Europeans in 1661. Approximately 500 acres surrounding Lake Warner have been protected through conservation restrictions and agricultural preservation restrictions.   A small boat ramp, constructed in 1961, allows the public to access to the pond (Hahn, 1962). The site of the old saw mill, which later became John C. Howe’s Broom Tool Factory, is located at 1 Mt. Warner Road. The current structure was built on the same footprint as the original mill building.

The Mill River downstream of Warner Dam passes over the abutments of another dam that used to run another saw mill and later Caleb Dickenson and Son Broom Tool Factory.  It meanders circuitously for 2700 feet before entering the Connecticut River, the banks of which have spectacular, large Cottonwood trees. This area was known as the "upper" ferry, after a ferry which ran between Hatfield and North Hadley until 1919.   It used to be docked in the winter in this at the base of the “double poplar.”  Old Ferry Road, the confluence of the Mill River and the Connecticut River and the farmland surrounding the area appear very much as it must have looked for nearly 300 year. Today the fields are worked with modern machinery and the forest, once totally logged, has regrown.

A Brief History of the Lake and Surroundings

Lake Warner is located entirely within the North Hadley National Historical District (No. 420740). The North Hadley Dam (HAD.910) forms this wholly artificial lake. The mill pond formed by the damming of the stream ensured a reliable source of energy for the mills and formed the historical landscape around which the village of North Hadley established itself.  It must be noted that there were several dams and that they were rebuilt several times.  The first dam, presumably of wood, was apparently begun in 1662, a year after Hadley was founded.  The site of the saw mill, circa 1664-65, and later broom corn tool factory are on the eastern bank.  The site of Hadley’s first corn mill, circa 1670-73, is on the western bank of Lake Warner where the First Settlers Monument is today (HAD.909).  Both the mills and the shop were run by water power supplied from the mill pond.  There may have been several dams or mill races.  There were also several later mills upstream.  A list of the properties abutting the lake that are registered with the MHC in the Village of North Hadley is included in Appendix 2.

There are few land features in the middle Connecticut River Valley, aside from the Connecticut River itself, that have had a more lasting and prominent role in the development of a community than the North Hadley Pond has had on North Hadley. The early settlers of Hadley had an immediate need for food, shelter and clothing. Mills were established to fulfill these needs and are significantly linked to the development of the village. The community of North Hadley literally developed around the mills and pond. The name first associated with the area was ‘’Upper Mills’’ but this was used interchangeably with "School Meadows".  The North Hadley Grist Mill became not only a place of industry but also served as a garrison, protecting the town from attack during the tumultuous era of the Indian Wars.  It was the destination for a group of settlers traveling from Deerfield during the Bloody Brook Massacre in 1675.

The grist mill, under the ownership of the Hopkins Academy, enabled the prosperity of the town and funded the education of its citizenry.  The mills were run for the commonwealth of the town.  Millwrights were given land and water rights in exchange for operating them. The grist mill was essential to grind grain for bread and provide feed for animals. The saw mill provided construction lumber for homes, barns and church while the development of the broom corn tool industry led to a regional, 18th century, industrial boom. The general store and post office adjacent to the Grist Mill was a central feature of the town and served as a central gathering place.  The water supply from the pond irrigated crops and was valued as a critical resource for fire-fighting prior to the establishment of a modern water supply infrastructure.  The pond was used to harvest ice prior to the availability of electrical refrigeration.  The recreational use of the pond for boating, fishing, swimming, skating, etc. has been appreciated for over two centuries. The spiritual and religious connection between the North Hadley Congregational Church and the pond has been present since its construction.  Religious services were held on the banks of the pond and on occasion from water.  The school is located on the banks of the pond as was the town hall, which served as the center of the town’s history, library and social activities.

The Second Grist Mill and Early History of Lake Warner

Grist mills were seen as an investment for the benefit of early colonial towns. The creation of the mill was made possible by an investment from the Hopkins Fund.  The location was already owned by the Hopkins Academy and called the Mill Lot.  “In 1667, the people voted their desire to have a mill on the East side, and the matter resulted in the building of a mill on Mill River, at North Hadley, probably the same year. William Goodwin, aided by the town, built this mill, and it was the second grist mill in town“(Holland, J.G. 1855, p. 218).  Reportedly an earlier grist mill was located across the river in what is now Hatfield.

In January of 1667,”The town made a grant of land for the use of the Grammar School in this town of Hadley and to be and remain perpetually to and for the use of said school, the two little meadows, next beyond the brook commonly called the Mill Brook, and as much upland to be laid to the same as the committee chosen by the town…” (Judd, S. 1905, p. 48). The Mill Lot extended from River Road on the west to the Mill Pond on the east, including the property from the bridge on Mt. Warner Road on the south through the site of the North Hadley School on the north. These two little meadows are described in Judd’s *History of Hadley* as the round neck of land and the long meadow that was reserved by the Indians in the first sale and afterwards purchased by itself.  “Both were estimated at 60 acres in 1682.  They now (1847) contain with the upland, more than 140 acres“(Judd, S., 1905. p. 49).  “On the 14th of January, 1684, the town voted to build a bridge over the Mill River at the mill, “by trestles or otherwise as the selectmen and Samuel Porter, senior, shall judge best.” (Judd, S., 1905, p. 38).

“Mr. Goodwin, with the consent of the other trustees, built from the Hopkins donation, a grist-mill upon Mill River, a little south of the school lands.  A house lot near the mill was granted to the miller on October 16, 1671.  Perhaps the mill was built that year.  No record is found of the exact year the mill was built, or of the grant by the town of the use the stream’’ (Judd, S. 1905. p 49).  It seems reasonable that the dam and mill were constructed sometime between 1670 and 1673.  The site of the first mill was located close to the Mt. Warner Road Bridge, northeast of the current location of the dam.  The ‘’mud sill’’ or foundation log of the dam, 15 inches in diameter, placed in 1662 was found in good condition when the pond was drained 150 years later’’ (Russell, D. 1959).  This foundation log was observed and photographed in 1947 when the pond was last fully drained.

During King Phillip’s War, 1675-78, the mill was used as a garrison but it was destroyed by Native Americans in September, 1677.  The school was fearful of further attacks and did not want to rebuild the mill.  “On November 6, 1677 a majority of the trustees were induced to dispose of the right belonging to the school to the town for 10 pounds; and the town to encourage Boltwood to build a mill, granted to him the mill-place and the remains of the dam, and the town granted four acres as a house lot for the miller, June 3, 1678. The mill was rebuilt by Robert Boltwood, encouraged by the town about 1678 or 1679(Judd, 1905, p. 50).

The sale to Boltwood was contentious and in March of 1680 the case was taken to court; it was decided that the sale by the trustees was illegal.  Boltwood was repaid what he had expended and the mill was retained by the school.  The committee of the Grammar School obtained it in 1683; the school trustees employed John Clary as a miller in 1683; and he was at the mill in 1684. Samuel Boltwood (his father Robert, had died in 1684) referred the matter to John Pynchon and John Allis, and as a result of their decision on March 30, 1685, the mill was delivered up to Samuel Boltwood.  After further dispute and court action it was again delivered up to the trustees of the Hopkins School in 1687, in whose possession it remained.  In November, 1687, Joseph Smith, the cooper, began to have care of the mill, alone or with his sons The mill and the dam were rebuilt in 1692, after the great February flood of that year; a new mill became necessary in 1706, and again in 1721 (Hopkins Academy p. 166).

‘’Joseph Smith was the first permanent resident of North Hadley. By 1716 he had a barn near the mill.  After 1726 he and his son Benjamin built a house on the Mill Lot.  The miller received half the toll from the mill, the use of the house and the land, and pay for his labor on the mill" (Russell, D. 1959).  Smith and his sons continued to rent land in the School Meadows for farmland and continued to operate the grist mill until Joseph’s death in 1733.  During this time the mills and water rights were owned by several individuals, primarily trustees of Hopkins Academy. Town records indicate that in 1771, the grist mill was owned in thirtieths, and the saw mill in sevenths, by a number of trustees.

In 1812, the mill privilege at North Hadley was leased for ninety-nine years, at an annual rental of twenty dollars in silver money.  ‘’In 1818 the mill rights were leased to Calvin and Charles Lamson (Russell, D. 1959). Eventually they were sold and ‘’conveyed by deed of quitclaim to L.N. Granger for $300, “it being all the property owned by the Trustees on or near the mill stream at No. Hadley.”  The estate of Mr. Granger paid for the same Dec. 22, 1877.  The Trustees received profits from it until 1865’’ (Hopkins Academy p. 166).

The Saw-Mill (c. 1664)

“Hadley gave to Thomas Meekins and Robert Boltwood, liberty to set a saw-mill on Mill River, on the East side, Jan. 27, 1662, and they might fall pine and oak timber, except rift timber in the Great Swamp beyond this river, and within 80 rods of the mill on this side. The Mill seems to have been built about 1664 or 1665. Boltwood’s saw-mill did not continue many years, and he sold his right to the place to three men in 1674.  Thomas Meekins had a saw-mill on the west side about 1669“(Judd, 1905. p. 41).

The town authorized another saw-mill further downstream on the Mill River in 1684. The site was developed later in the 1840’s being the first location where broom making tools were made by Caleb Dickenson and Sons. The lower dam and Caleb Dickenson and Son’s Broom Tool Shop are both located on the 1873 Map of Hadley. The Broom Tool Shop is identified by the MHC as Inv. No. Had. 221 on Old Ferry Rd. “A considerable lumbering business was done between 1860 and 1870 by L.M. Granger, who was also a building contractor“(Judd, 1905. p. 457).

The Meadows (c. 1664-1865)

Around the time the first mill was built the Hopkins trustees invested some of their fund in 60 acres of land, called Grass Meadow and Point Meadow, lying above and below the Red Rocks along the Connecticut River. ‘’The land was leased to Hadley farmers who raised wheat, rye, corn, oats, and other crops there.  The lease was payable in in crops which were then sold for the profit of the school, hence the name ‘’School Meadows’’ (Russell, D. 1959).  These agreements along with the grist mill relationship are significant because they describe property and ownership relationships in the colonial era and during the early formation of the government of the commonwealth. ‘’By 1726 two lessees of the meadow had each built a small house and barn nearby and had leased the land for 21 years.  Thus, the first settlers of the village were on property controlled by the Hopkins trustees, called the ‘’unaccountable committee’’ because they were self-perpetuating and were accountable to no one’’ (Russell, D. 1959).  This had the effect of increasing the profitability of the Hopkins fund, the growth of the town, and encouraged development of the village.  Though this growth was slow at first with only three families living in the village in 1731, and by 1770 eighteen men among the residents, over the next century the village grows rapidly.  ‘’One of the more important changes that occurs at the end of the Civil War was the granting of permission, in 1865, by the State Supreme Court for the Hopkins trustees to sell School Meadows and the Mill Lot, which had been on school property, since the founding of the village.  Those who were leasing the land at the time, acquired most of the property’’ (Russell, D. 1959).

The 19th-Century Broom Corn Industry in North Hadley

In 1797, Levi Dickenson, a farmer in Hadley, began growing broom corn and making brooms for sale. Due to his success, increasing acreage of broom corn was grown in Hadley each year, and by 1800 he and his sons were making hundreds of brooms a year and selling them around the region.  “In 1810 the census return for Hampshire County showed that 70,000 corn brooms were marketed there that year” (Daily Hampshire Gazette, May 8, 1929).  ‘’Prosperity showed in the rapid growth of population between 1835 and 1840, when the Lamson, Marsh, Howe, Clark, Dickenson, and Scott families joined those already at Hadley Upper Mills’’ (Russell, D. 1959).  ‘’By 1850, Massachusetts was second only to New York in broom making, producing well over a million brooms that would be sold throughout the United States and as far away as South America” (Nobles, G.H., 1984, p. 288). Most of the production of these brooms came from Hadley, and as the broom making business grew, North Hadley household production of brooms grew also.

Caleb Dickenson purchased a privilege on the Mill River, in 1840, in North Hadley, and erected a factory which he operated alone until 1870, when he was then joined by his son-in-law, John Howe.  Both men were blacksmiths and created tools used in the manufacture of corn brooms.  Hadley would continue to lead New England in the production of broom corn, and the manufacture of brooms for many years.  The number of brooms manufactured in 1845 was 599,369” (Holland, J.G. 1855. p. 223). “In 1850, the census showed that 761,700 brooms, valued at $118,478 and 76,000 brushes, valued at $5,970, were made at 41 places in Hadley” (Daily Hampshire Gazette May 8, 1929).  “The largest individual manufactures were Thaddeus Smith and his successor G. Myron Smith, who made a specialty of brooms for export “(Judd, 1905. p. 457).There were 110 broom makers in Hadley in 1850; of these many were residents of North Hadley and had families there. Alfred Hibbard was one of the largest broom makers in town, his shop is shown in the 1854 Map of North Hadley.

Broom making encouraged other manufacturing industries; broom handles, wire, paint and varnish shops were established.  641,120 brooms and 35,000 brushes were manufactured and sold in Hadley in 1855.  Broom-making probably reached its peak by the 1850s and 1860s and, as late as 1875, Hadley was still by far the leading producer of brooms in Massachusetts with seventy six people employed as broom-makers, most of them combining broom-making with farming.  “Post-civil war, with expanding agriculture lands in the west the industry began to decline.  In 1885, the number of those involved in the broom-making business had dropped to thirty, by 1895 the number had fallen to eight”.  The mills on both sides and dam were damaged by a succession of fires and floods before the last grist mill on the west side was destroyed by fire in 1925. On the eastern side of the dam is the site of the broom tool factory run by Caleb Dickenson and his son in law John C. Howe, at 1 Mt. Warner Road, knives were continued to be made at this site until Arthur Howe’s death in 1961.

J.G. Holland gives a detailed description of the level of industry occurring in North Hadley, the “middle site” being the current location of Warner Dam.  The grist mill and plaster factory and the saw mill described are all detailed on the North Hadley Map of 1873 and are accompanied by the business listings.

“At the middle site on the Mill River, at North Hadley, is occupied by the grist mill, plaster mill and saw mill of Smith & Granger, and the wire manufactory of Horace Lamb. The grist mill has three run of stones, and does a good custom business. From 100 to 150 tuns are annually ground in the plaster mill. The saw mill has an upright and circular saw for logs, in which are annually manufactured from four to 500,000 feet of lumber. A lathe machine is also connected. In the wire factory, from 8 to 10 tuns of broom wire, are annually made, besides an amount of plated and piano wire, varying from year to year according to demand” (Holland, J.G. 1855, p 229).

The North Hadley Grist Mill Stones today are embedded in the exterior wall of the Millstone Store in Sunderland, (Hahn, 2010).

Mrs. J.W. Clark also recalls the wire factory at this location in a paper written for Dorothy M. Russell in 1908.  She noted, “There was a flax carding machine in connection with the mill, also piano strings and other wires were manufactured until the disaster of 1847, when because of a sudden *freshet (spring flood)* the wire works were tipped over into the water.  The wireworks were again established and were continued until 1860 when they were moved to Northampton” (Clark, J.W. unpublished 1908). Holland also describes that the lower site on the Mill River, near the Connecticut, “is occupied by a saw-mill with two upright saws, owned by Rufus Scott” (Holland, J.G. 1855. p. 229).  The lower site is also referred to in an unpublished piece written by Earl E. Breor; he mentions “passing the site of an old dam used by Scott’s soap factory and the first shop where broom knives were made” (Breor, Earle E., unpublished, ND).

  During the flood of 1927, this lower dam ‘was partially breached.  A current photo of the lower dam site abutments shows the remains of the dam in its current state.  Bob Hahn grew up in and lived at 223 River Drive until he was 55 years old.  Bob recalled that "[the lower dam was strictly a saw mill, and the lower dam ‘floated’ out during a flood in 1927.  The house next door to Bob Hahn’s (223 River Drive) was originally located at the exit of the brook at the Connecticut River.  It was owned by the ferry keeper.  Later it was moved to its present location at 223 River Drive.  Ben Denio lived in my Bob’s house long before it was owned by the Hahn’s.  He and his boat went over the ‘main’ dam before it was level and “it sucked him right down, boat and all.  Never found the old buzzard” (Doug Hahn, personal communication). On the back of the photo was written ‘’ Mr. Ben Denio and Family, he was later drowned at age 70 in the 1927 flood he and his boat went over the North Hadley Dam and were never found.”

The Upper Ferry, Hadley to Hatfield (c. 1692-1919)

The first record of a regular ferry in the northern part of town is 1692. John Ingram appears as ferryman at the north end in 1692. John Preston succeeded Ingram (Judd, S. 1905, p 39).  At the confluence of the Mill River and the Connecticut River, an “upper” ferry was run between North Hadley and Hatfield, this ferry ran for over 100 years.  The first ferry man in this location was Samuel Partigg. Later, John Breor was the ferryman here for over 30 years.  This crossing was discontinued in 1919 as more people were travelling by automobile (Cutter, M. 1980, p.).  The location of the upper ferry is identified on the 1895 map, a section of which is shown in Photograph12. Photograph 13 is a 1905 photo of the upper ferry, with a current view of the site from 2014 shown.  The winter docking location was on the North Hadley side at the mouth of the Mill River until 1919.

The Pond and Recreational Uses

Following the decline in the broom corn industry the Pond was increasingly utilized for recreational boating and fishing.  One of two boat liveries operated on the pond was located at the site of the old Blacksmith Shop on the Scott Farm at Mt. Warner Road (photographs 17, 18).  This livery was eventually taken over by the Hahn Family and run until the late 1950’s from their property at 223 River Drive.  There was also a boat launching facility on Frank Scott’s land in between the Congregational Church (HAD.202) and the North Hadley School and Village Hall (HAD.200) with an archway identifying the ‘’Lakeside boat launch’’.  This property was eventually taken by eminent domain by the town for the purpose of creating a ball field (HAD.926) for the school and community on February 7, 1916.  The deed for this taking is filed in the Hampshire County Registry of Deeds in Book 720 P. 91-92.

Lake Warner Lakeview Club (1902-1960)

The Lake View Club established in August of 1902, purchased McDonald’s Island which was about an acre and a half in size at the time.  The club resolved to enlarge the house on the island and improve the grounds.  Membership of the club was limited to fifty persons and use of the island was exclusively for its members, their families, and friends.  At its founding, in 1902 their membership consisted of thirty-five individuals.  The officers of the club at the time were John E. Bates, president, William Grant, vice president, W.H. Comins, secretary, Myron C. Baily, treasurer. John E. Bates, John Landy.   William Grant of Northampton and John C. Field of North Hadley were chosen trustees (Daily Hampshire Gazette, August 19, 1902).  An article in the Gazette eight years later showed the club was still active and described successful ice fishing on the pond in January of 1910.  ‘’The fishing on the pond has been fine since the ice came.  W.H. Comins has caught several pickerel weighing two pounds each. Monday he was out for the fourth time and caught 30 pickerel there.  Some members of the Lake View Club were over with friends the same day and caught 101.  Mr. Comins has caught 121 in all.  More than 150 pounds have been caught recently.” (Daily Hampshire Gazette, January 5, 1910).  There is very little information about the club between 1910 and the 1930’s.

The residents of North Hadley decided to rekindle the North Hadley Lake View Club in the 1930s or 1940s, for events, recreations and athletics, meeting in various North Hadley locations.  From the late 1940s to the late 1950s, their "meeting place" was a location in a little grove on Mt. Warner Road in North Hadley where a small shack and dance floor had been built for Polish Sunday picnics.  This grove was nicknamed (and listed in the papers as such) "Kushi's Grove" as it was owned by North Hadley farmer Joseph Kushi. (Kushi, 2015).  The North Hadley Lake View Club continued to operate until the late 1950’s.  Postcards of the area dating to the early 1900s.

Changes in use of the lake in the mid-20th-Century

When the popularity of the North Hadley Pond increased in the early 20th century, the Department of Fish and Game began to seek out a relationship with the pond owner with the intent of stocking the pond for the public benefit.  According to Department of Fish and Game Records, under Chapter 140, Resolves of 1910, the North Hadley Pond was identified as a 48 acre lake that had the potential as a water body to be stocked by the Department of Fish and Game.  In 1912 the pond was identified as a pond having good potential for stocking by the Commonwealth and John C. Howe is identified as the owner.  Beginning in 1928, due to concerns by a local Fish & Game Association that fish may be lost during the drawdown of the lake for repair of the dam, communication between the Chief of Fisheries, the local warden, and John C. Howe’s descendant Arthur C. Howe increased.  Records of these communications have been saved by the Department of Fish and Game. They were retrieved from the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Field Headquarters in Westborough and copies were made.

The Warden asked Mr. Howe in 1929 to “notify him or this office at once if at any time in the future the pond would be drained, so that efforts to salvage the fish can be made.”  He goes on to say that this is a wonderful pond for bass, pickerel, horned pout, and yellow perch.  ‘’Our records show that this pond has been stocked in the past, but without the consent of the owner.  Anyon (*the warden*) feels quite certain that Mr. Howe will sign an agreement allowing the public to fish from the pond, which will enable us to stock it from time to time.  I am sending the proper form of agreement along to Anyon today, as he knows Mr. Howe personally.  As a matter of fact, Anyon says that he has been enforcing the law on this pond and considers it a State stocked pond, but I told him we must have an agreement, if possible” (Kitson, J. A. 1929).

The Private Pond Agreement was signed by Arthur C. Howe on August 29, 1929 and these records document the beginning of the officially recognized consent by a private mill pond owner to” reasonably allow the public access the pond” for recreational purposes. (Private pond Agreement, 1929).  This agreement was to last for ten years from the date of stocking.  Mr. Howe was thanked in a letter from the Director of Fish and Game (Adams to Howe, 1929).  It was stocked (officially) in October of the same year, with 4,600 fish, blue gills and crappie (Adams, 1929).  During this era, the blacksmith shop opposite 1 Mt. Warner Road was owned by Harry Scott and used as a boathouse.  Appreciation for the recreational use of the pond is reflected in an article published in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*: “The beauty of this little lake, which lies along the north side of Mt. Warner is ever a source of satisfaction and enjoyment to the residents of the village. The lake affords excellent opportunities for boating, canoeing, and swimming.  It is famed near and far for the bass, perch, pickerel and bullheads which thrive in its waters” (Daily Hampshire Gazette, July 27, 1935).  The article goes on to explain that the greatest importance of Lake Warner lay not in its recreational uses, but in its availability as a water source for fighting local fires.

The use of the pond for fire protection became the main reason for the involvement of the Town to assist in the repair, modernizing, and raising of the dam in 1947.  As early as 1935, citizens of North Hadley were arguing that responsibility for upkeep and repair of the dam should be the responsibility of the town rather an individual landowners.  A fire in 1937 underscored the necessity of Lake Warner.  Coverage of the fire in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* noted that

”One result of the North Hadley fire on Sunday morning is the realization of the immense value of the North Hadley Pond to the village. Had it not been for the two streams of water pumped from the channel on to the burning buildings the result would have been much more disastrous. Now that the pond is low because the dam is being repaired, there are but few places where the fire truck can reach the channel. When the pond is at a normal level there are several places easily accessible “(Daily Hampshire Gazette, Aug.14, 1935).

Arthur C. Howe signed additional stocking agreements with the Department of Fish and Game in 1938and 1944 (MDFG, 1938, 1944).  In the 1944 stocking agreement Howe indicates that he cannot be responsible for the lowering water level of Lake Warner, attributing it to breaks in the dam and needed repairs (MDFG, 1944).  He receives a thank you letter from H.S. DuMont, Director of Fish and Game (DuMont, 1944).

The repairs necessary to fix the dam were significant enough that cooperative agreement to repair the dam was made between Arthur C. Howe and the Town of Hadley; the town recognized the utility of having the pond as a water supply in case of fire, as there were not hydrants in North Hadley at the time.  The details of this agreement are documented in the Hampshire County Registry of Deeds in Book 1012-355 (2/25/47). In order to ensure adequate water levels for fire department hoses, the height of the dam was raised by approximately four feet at this time.  While there are no engineering plans associated with this repair, the indication in John C. Howe’s will is that the height of the structure at that time (1919) was 13 feet from the river bed (Book 708-19).  Later engineering evaluations indicate the dam height at 17 feet, reflecting the 1947 modifications to the dam (Huntley Associates, P.C. 2007).  The area of the lake increased as a result of the raising in height of the dam from 49 acres (1910) to 68 acres (Massachusetts Division of Fish and Game, 1952).  It was around this time that discussions began about management of fisheries in Lake Warner.

It was not until 1961, however, that action regarding the reclamation of Lake Warner was initiated by the Division of Fish and Game (Tomkins, 1961).  As preparations were being made, issues surfaced about public access, and an official right-of-way inquiry was made by the Division of Fish and Game.  Records show correspondence between Representative John G. Clark and Director Charles L. McLaughlin were made with regard to Lake Warner in October and September of 1961. Arthur C. Howe passed away and ownership of the dam and water rights were granted to Earl R. Hahn and Martha A. Hahn (September 12, 1961 and recorded at the Hampshire County Registry of Deeds in Book 1361-157).  A news release explained the plan for Lake Warner, the acceptance of responsibility for the right-of-way by the Town of Hadley, the right of way for the fishing public and a public fishing agreement with the pond owner (Hampshire Gazette, 1961).  The issues regarding the public right-of-way were resolved in spring of 1962 through a Management Agreement on a Privately Owned Pond.  The agreement was signed by the Selectmen of Hadley, Earl R. Hahn, and Joseph Klimnoski, who resided at the broom tool factory site and retained a mill privilege associated with the dam (Hahn 1962).  The gift of the area for the boat ramp to the Town of Hadley by Earl and Evelyn Hahn was made on May, 8 1962, and is recorded in the Hampshire County Registry of Deeds in Book 1378-166.

On September 17th, 1962, the lake was “reclaimed” by the Massachusetts Division of Fish and Game Wildlife and rotenone was added to Lake Warner and its tributary streams.  “A total of 3 ½ tons of fish were actually picked up in Lake Warner and the estimated total kill was about 6 tons.  This amounts to almost 200 pounds of fish per acre which is well above the state average” (McLaughlin, 1962). In 1962 and 1963 the pond was restocked with bass.  Lake Warner was biologically sampled by the Division of Fish and Wildlife in 1964 and 1965.  The last sampling effort was July, 1981.  The fishery was found to be balanced and still highly productive.  The management objectives were to manage as a largemouth bass fishery.  The management recommendations were to ”1. Leave the pond as is.  The largemouth bass population has good recruitment, growth and stock density.  Yellow perch have good growth with fish up to 12 inches.  2. Consider weed control, if necessary.” (Brenner, 1981).

The dam and water rights were owned by the Hahn family between 1961 and 1970.  The Hahn family lived at 223 River Drive; they rented boats for recreation and fishing use throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Doug Hahn, personal communication).  The Hahn family also ran the general store in North Hadley until 1970. John and Martha Boisvert purchased the store, along with the dam and water rights to the Mill River in 1970. Their son, Joe Boisvert’s family farm still is in operation on the north-east side of Lake Warner and the Scott and Smith properties are still being farmed by this family. The dam and water rights are currently owned by Lake Warner LLC, under the control of Kestrel Land Trust and since 1994 have been retained in the interest of conservation and preservation of this historic lake and landscape.  Following the repairs scheduled for July of 2016, the Friends of Lake Warner and the Mill River will take over ownership of the dam and water rights with the intention of managing the lake for recreational and conservation uses.  A historic preservation restriction has been placed on the dam property to go along with the sale.  The lake continues to be a popular place for recreational boating, fishing, bird watching, ice fishing, ice skating, snowmobiling, cross country skiing and snowshoeing.