

RECORD CROWD FOR 'TALES OF OSSIPEE LAKE' GHOST NIGHT

Thunder rumbled in the distance and rain fell gently in the quiet summer evening, creating the perfect atmosphere for the Ghost of Ossipee Lake presentation that Ossipee Lake Alliance co-sponsored with Green Mountain Conservation Group at Calumet Conference Center in August as part of Freedom Old Home Week.

A crowd of more than 300 people - one of the largest events ever at the conference center - filled the center's main tent to hear author Janice Petrie talk about her book "Perfection To A Fault," which details the 1918 murder of Florence Small by her husband Frederick at the Small's Ossipee Lake cottage.

The main theme of the evening was not so much the murder itself, however, but the rumors that a ghostly presence continues to haunt the murder site on the lake. In this, Petrie was able to provide a first-hand account of an aborted childhood vacation she had in the cottage with her parents, a chilling encounter described in the opening chapter of her book, as well as her discussions with the current owner of the property, who confirms the reports of something inexplicable in the house.

Petrie's talk was preceded by a presentation by Barry Hill, a lake resident and former president of the Ossipee Historical Society, who offered a lively narration of pictures showing Ossipee and Freedom at the time of the murder, including the site of the cottage where the murder occurred and the court house where Frederick Small was convicted.



The Alliance's Susan Marks and David Smith, left, with author Janice Petrie and Ossipee historian Barry Hill after the Tales of Ossipee Lake presentation in August as part of Freedom Old Home Week. *Alliance Photo*

Small later was hanged for his crime.

Petrie also showed a videotape of a program segment produced by Boston's "Chronicle" television program which concluded that the ghostly presence was Frederick. Not so, according to Petrie, who believes that it is definitely Florence's spirit that haunts the lake.

In the final analysis, Petrie believes the ghost of Ossipee Lake is a fairly benign character - spooky but not menacing; a Casper-like "friendly ghost," as she described it.

The evening was a fund-raiser for the Ossipee and Freedom Historical Societies. Autographed copies of Petrie's book sold briskly after the presentation with the proceeds from the sale split equally between the two historical organizations. Two lucky attendees also won copies of the book.

The Ghost of Ossipee Lake was the second in the "Tales of Ossipee Lake" series on the human and natural history of the lake and is part of the Ossipee Lake Protection Program. A previous presentation in July explored the lake's rare and endangered pond shore habitats.