

Blodgett's Landing



The Casino at Blodgett's Landing in the 1920s. Site of weekly dances, plays and all around good-times.

Blodgett's Landing C.O.A. – The Early Years...

By John Greenwood

Have you ever heard of *Cressyville*? No? How about *Cressy's Landing*? Well, that could very well be the name of a section of Newbury called *Blodgett's Landing*! Here's why...

Will Cressy was a world-class entertainer and great friend to Blodgett's Landing. He and his wife, Blanche Dayne, were famous vaudevillians from the 1890s thru the 1920s. Will's career was well covered in a *SooNipi Magazine* Summer 2007 article entitled "*Cressy & Dayne*" by John Warren.

Will was the driving force at Blodgett's to get the "Casino" built at the beginning of the 20th century. He was also president of the Blodgett's C.O.A. (Cottage Owners Association), trustee, and a major C.O.A. supporter throughout his life.

Will Cressy was considered "the Bob Hope of World War I". He was seriously injured by a mustard gas explosion in 1918 while entertaining the troops in France. This led to his early retirement from vaudeville and his death in January 1930.

He and his wife owned the cottage on Cressy Point where they entertained family and many famous show people. These few pages cover

mainly Will Cressy's activities and contributions to Blodgett's Landing. He wrote a 1921 newspaper article entitled C.O.A. and L.S.P.A. are *Good Angels of Lake Sunapee*. Well, it can be said that Will M. Cressy was a "Good Angel" to the C.O.A and Blodgett's Landing.

The C.O.A. Beginnings

The Blodgett's C.O.A. was founded in 1894 by 20 cottage owners. As stated in the 1911 C.O.A. first Handbook:

"The object of the association was primarily to provide entertainment for the cottage owners and residents of Blodgett Landing, control the sanitary conditions, and so far as the means of the association would permit, attend to the lighting of the roads and the maintenance of sidewalks, and such other matters as might contribute to the general health, happiness and comfort of the community."

In other words, the C.O.A. was to act in every respect as the local governing body with responsibility and control of the "local affairs" of Blodgett's Landing. The C.O.A. did admirably well with the meager funds they had to operate on.

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The C.O.A. struggled in the early years. It was not until Will M. Cressy stepped onto the scene in the late 1890s that the C.O.A. began to take off with enthusiasm and spirit to get the job done!

Will M. Cressy, born in Bradford, NH, was a consummate world-class vaudeville entertainer. He was looking for an outlet for his talents and energy during the summer, after the annual vaudeville circuit ended. Will was either the President or a trustee of the C.O.A. from 1901 until the mid-1920's. Like Rumpelstiltskin, he was practically able to spin straw into gold.

Building The Casino

In an *Independent Statesman* (Concord, NH) newspaper article, August 1921, Will gives an amusing account of the genesis of the C.O.A. Casino at Blodgett's in 1900-1901.

"...we, (Mr. and Mrs. Will Cressy) became summer dwellers at Blodgett's. Being of a hospitable nature we began to invite our actor friends up to spend a week or a month. And about everyone that visited us immediately bought or built a home. The result of this was that quite an actor colony sprang up there. You can no more keep an actor from acting than you can keep a prohibitionist from cheating. And these actors wanted to act. Of course it would be under the heading of "a benefit." There was no fire department, no police department, no poor people. There was a Spiritualist Society, but it had more money than the actors did. And then one day some bright soul discovered it; discovered something they could hang a benefit on. The C.O.A. They must need money. They surely didn't have any.... It was decided to give "A Monster Benefit Vaudeville Performance for the Cottage Owners' Association of Blodgett's Landing." And it was done. Cressy & Dayne, Matthews & Harris and George B. Wright constituted the program. Result, Sixty dollars (15 cents admission.) Now the question was — what to do with it?"

After days of worrying, "Bill" Matthews struck the Grand Idea... We would build a real casino or club house..."

So, the work of building a "Casino" was begun. Two years later the result was a great function and recreation center owned and operated



Cressy Point and the "Weirinnett" cottage of Will & Blanche Cressy – early 1900's

by the C.O.A. The interior of the Casino boasted a 500-seat theater with a first class stage, bowling alleys, two pool rooms, a library. Also, eight bath houses, a wharf and shower facilities. The Casino was situated on a sandy beach, owned by the C.O.A. There were weekly entertainment events at the Casino, including Wednesday and Saturday night dances with an orchestra secured by Will Cressy as well as plays and vaudeville acts throughout the summer and Friday night movies.

Maintaining the Facilities

In addition, the C.O.A. provided maintenance for the street lights, the lakefront boardwalk, and two watchman who visited the cottages twice weekly in the winter.

The C.O.A. activities were financed by the annual membership dues (\$3), plus a heavy dose of charitable contributions. The annual COA Fair was held each August to supplement the C.O.A. funds. (See August 1907 poster ad at left). The story goes that Will Cressy was the auctioneer and that he made sure that every item had a generous bid from his many associates and friends by the end of the Fair.

The Annual C.O.A. Regatta

The C.O.A. held an annual regatta (boat races) at Blodgett's Landing. This event seemed to have enthusiastic participation from regatta entrants and large crowds watching the regatta events – from land and water.

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Bowles Park

In 1921, Henry R. Bowles donated six acres of land to the C.O.A. adjacent to the Casino Grounds. Will M. Cressy spearheaded the project and personally did a lot of the work to develop the land for recreational use by the C.O.A. In a 1922 article, Will, in an interview with a newspaper reporter, described the project as follows: *Will M. Cressy, well known actor and president of the Cottage Owners' Association, after completing his circuit with B. F. Keith went to work on the property early in the summer and his master hand, incidentally aided with \$2,500 of the association money, has worked wonders. Small trees and shrubbery have been removed from the tract. two tennis courts have been made and a general grading process applied to the property which has been transformed into the present "Bowles Park." One of the show places of which the C.O.A. is justly proud.*

The Cressys are Honored

On August 26, 1925 the C.O.A. gave a surprise dinner party at the Blodgett Lodge to honor Will and Blanche Cressy's contributions. You may be interested in looking at some of the memorabilia from that party - quite an affair - see website footnote below. There you can read an original letter and poem Will wrote in response to a jingle written by E.M. Kelsey for the dinner party. Here is an excerpt from the poem:

*It made tears and smiles mingle
To read your fine "jingle"
About the fine spread that we had;
Of the eats and the drinks,
And the speaks and the thinks.
We forgot the meaning of "sad."*

*It's a mighty fine thing
To eat, gab and sing,
Especially up at "the end",
And to look down the side,
And swell up with pride,
When you know everyone is A FRIEND.*

A Concord newspaper article reported Will's final remarks at the dinner:

"...he wished to thank all for the way that they had assisted him in carrying on the work of the association during the years that he had been its head



The crowd watching an annual C.O.A. Regatta

and that he still stood ready to do all in his power for the future success of the organization"

And fitting for Will M. Cressy, vaudevillian, humorist, philanthropist, community-minded human being and friend to the Blodgett's C.O.A. is the way he signed his letter containing the poem above: *Best regards to Thee and Thine from Me and Mine, Will M. Cressy*

In a way, the party was Will's farewell to the C.O.A. Will and Blanche moved to Florida for the winters until his death in 1930. Will said his lungs couldn't take the cold New Hampshire winter any longer (due to the 1918 mustard gas).



Will & Blanche Cressy.

Ed. Notes: Newspaper accounts of Will Cressy contributed to this article as well as information from the Cressy family archives, as collected by Cressy Goodwin. Also, the 1925 C.O.A. dinner original poem is from the Kelsey family archives.

Additional information about the C.O.A., historic photographs and postcards of Blodgett's Landing can be found on the website:

www.johngreenwood.net/Blodgetts

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Artwork by Hal Merritt
Blodgett's Landing
Aug. 14, 1907

Poster for the Cottage Owners Association Fair - Blodgett's Landing, Aug. 17, 1907.



Large crowd gathered near the Casino, Blodgett Lodge in background. - Kara Obey Collection