

**“ ’Twas a dark and stormy night ....”**

**It happened only about twenty three years ago...but even that short time can still be ‘history’, can’t it? Perhaps many in Columbia have forgotten about it; perhaps many weren’t even aware of it when it happened! So, on with the story.....**

**Columbia had had a torrent of rain over several days; it seemed to come down without end. On June 8, 1980, in the early dark hours of the morning, phones began to ring all over town. Calls went out...”The dam is in danger, come help!” Sleepy men climbed out of bed, donned wet weather gear and drove to the dam area.**

**The dam had recently been rebuilt, but apparently specifications had not been carefully followed. The spillway should have been riprapped: that is, it should have had stone protection for the base on the downstream side. As the level of the lake rose, two feet of water rushed over the spillway, ricocheted off a cement wall and began eating at the earthen back of the dam. If that unprotected back of the dam had ‘gone’, the dam would have been “breached”, or blown out. All the water in the lake would have rushed downstream through the dam brook, reached the Hop River, into the Willimantic River, perhaps flooding that town. It might have caused damage as far downstream as Yantic or Norwich.**

**And our beautiful lake would have been lost.**

**Pete Naumec and his department have a policy of opening the gate when there is a storm, and monitoring it until danger is past, which they did this day. Perhaps it was on a late trip to monitor the dam situation when the danger was seen. Quickly a crew of town workers and townspeople assembled. Orders were given. Joe Szegda, first selectman at the time, ordered a truck sent to Portland where the DOT stored unfilled sandbags. Only 300 were available because Middletown had a flooding problems also. Pete had two truckloads of sand brought to the dam. Quickly an assembly line was formed...a bag held open, shovel loads of sand until the bag was three-quarter filled, a twist of the top, pass it down the line...a regular conga line, from the access road across the dam slope to the spillway. Nobody can recall how many men formed the**