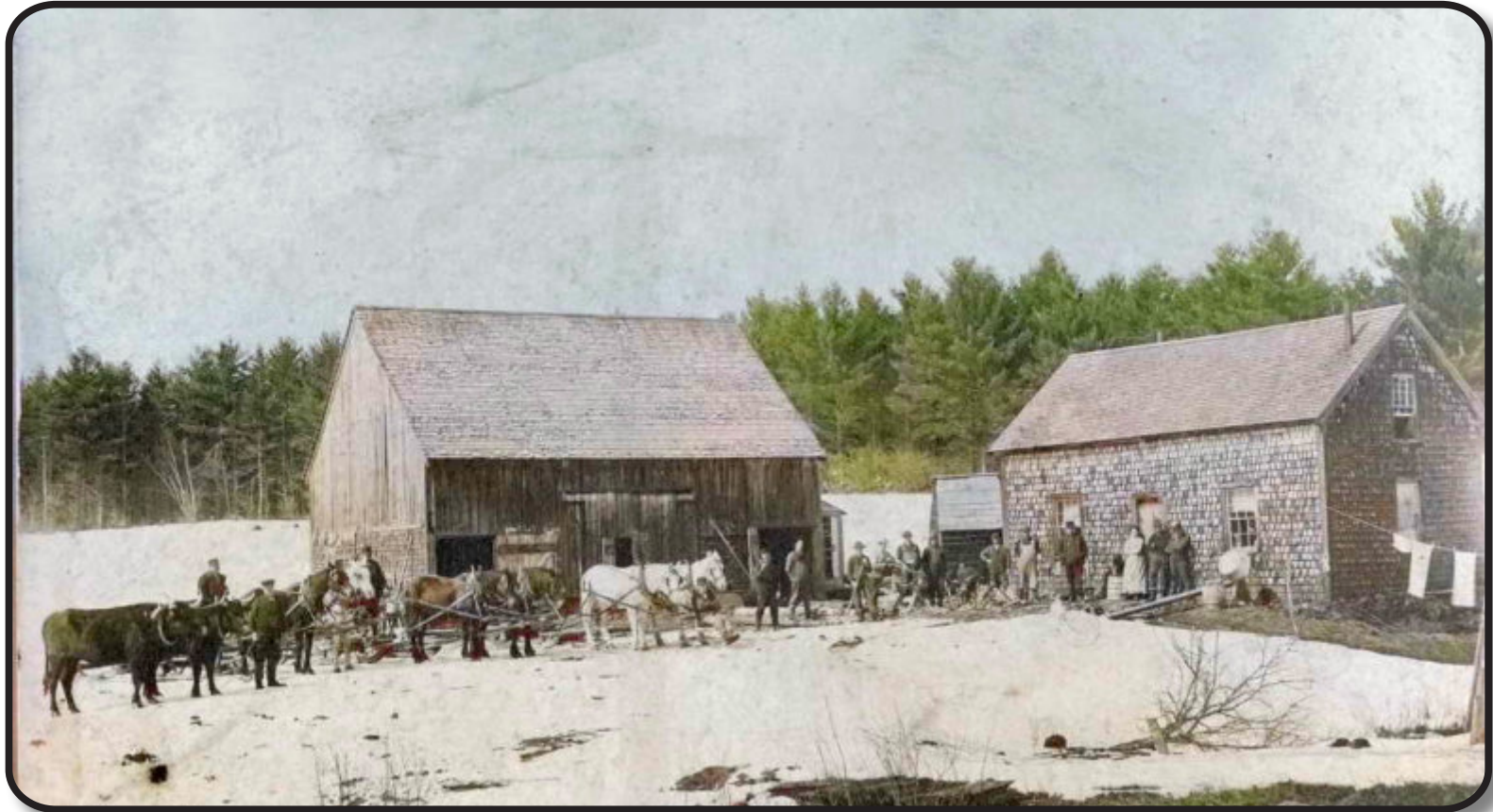


SEBAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS



NEIGHBORHOODS OF SEBAGO

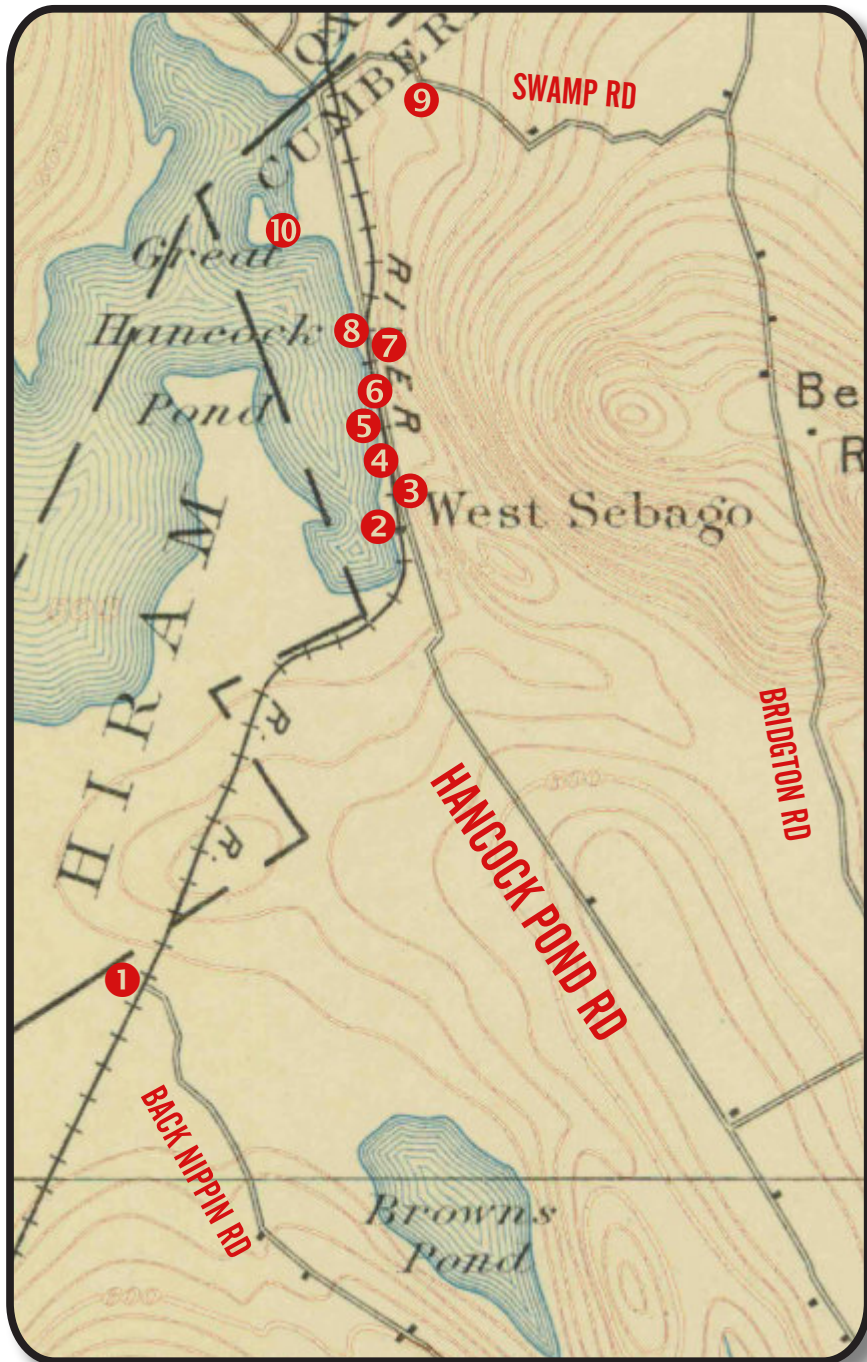
HANCOCK POND ROAD, PART 2 2023

January 2023

This year we continue investigating Hancock Pond Road, concentrating on the area along the pond. The history of this piece of town is dominated by the Narrow Gauge Railroad, formally known as the Bridgton & Saco River Rail Road or B&SRRR. Built in 1882, the railroad ran from Hiram to Bridgton, and later to Harrison, passing right along the shore of Hancock Pond. It was a great help in promoting the summer visitor business that flourished during this era. With stops at Barker Pond and Hancock Pond, it brought customers to the inns and cottages throughout town, and youngsters to the summer camps. Although the rails were taken up during World War II, the roadbed is still easy to follow, partly as dirt road, partly as walking trail, except right near Hancock Pond where cottages now stand in its former path.

Approximate locations of the buildings discussed in this calendar are shown on this excerpt from the 1896 USGS map.

- ❶ Chessey House (February)
- ❷ Merle Douglass Home (March)
- ❸ Jim's Inn (April)
- ❹ Witham Station (May)
- ❺ Bennett House (June)
- ❻ Water Tower (July)
- ❼ Capital City (August)
- ❽ Mackey Cottage (September)
- ❾ Asa Weeman (October)
- ❿ Camp Wabunaki (November/December)



February 2023

Chessey House

Entering Sebago from Hiram, the Narrow Gauge came by this house, occupied by Samuel and Delina Chessey, at the end of the Back Nippin Rd. The Chesseys birthed and raised their children, twins Samuel Jr and Ephraim, Israel, Louis, Freeman and Alex, in this house. By 1891, though, after the railroad came through, Delina grew fearful of hobos, who were known to jump off trains in remote locations to sleep in outbuildings and raid gardens. She moved the family about a mile down the

Back Nippin Road, past Brown's Pond, closer to Mud City and nearer to neighbors.

During this time the property by the railroad was owned by the Young brothers of the Hiram Lumber Company, who used the house as a lumber camp after the Chesseys moved. The photo on the cover shows the house and crew from those days. Most of the crew came from Hiram, but the last man on the right is Samuel Chessey, Jr.



March 2023

Coming out of the woods and down by the shore of Hancock Pond, the railroad passed the parcel of land that Merle and Doris Douglass acquired from the Babb heirs in 1947. They began building their home shortly afterwards. Like many others at the time, they used some of the salvaged materials that came from the dismantled Capitol City property which was located a short distance away. The hardwood flooring that was in the bowling alley became the floors in their new home. This home remained in the Douglass family until 2020, and is now owned by Candace and Douglass Masse. The railroad bed continued along the pond in front of the homes and cottages until it passed the Water Tower, then crossed the road on its way to Bridgton.



Merle Douglass Home



After Merle built his house, he moved this structure onto the property and made it into a garden shed for his wife Doris. It had started out in Convene at the Weed farm as a chicken coop in the 1930s, then in the 40s it served as Clayton Douglass' turkey coop. In 2018 it was fixed up and painted, furniture was added, and now it is a She Shed.

Doris and Merle Douglas at the new house, 1948

Jim's Inn

April 2023

Richard Merrifield, son of Loren and Edna Witham Merrifield and grandson of Jacob Witham, was a Section Hand on the railroad. He built this cottage in 1909 on the upper side of Hancock Pond Road for himself and his new wife, Mabel (Mary) Foster. Unfortunately, he died of Bright's Disease (kidney failure) only four years later at the age of 30, leaving his widow Mary and two sons.

By 1922, Mary had remarried and was living in Limington. She sold the property to Austin "Jim" Lamont, a carpenter and World War I veteran from Hiram. He named the cottage "Jim's Inn." Three years after his death in 1965, his widow Mattie sold it to Thomas and Henrietta Hammond; and in 1970 it was sold to the Holt family. Jerry and Alice Holt currently reside there. They have the original "Jim's Inn" sign still hanging on the porch.

Opposite the house is the site of the former ice house that supplied the neighboring homes.



May 2023

Witham Station

Long before the railroad was built, Elias Witham brought his young wife Hannah to the Hancock Pond area. They built a farm and lived there with their three children from 1851 to 1857, when Elias sold the 50-acre lot to his brothers, Aaron and Jacob. By 1864, Jacob had become sole owner of the property. Jacob, a Civil War veteran, and his wife, Sylvia Sanborn, raised ten children there. Their large farm sat on the hill overlooking the pond and backing up to the Hillside neighborhood of the Irish family.

In 1884, two years after the railroad was built, the West Sebago station was erected on the Witham's land. Jacob was its first stationmaster, and it became known as Witham Station. Summer visitors disembarking at the station were picked up by wagons waiting to take them to nearby guest houses, such as Elm Cottage and Sunset Villa. You can just make out the name "Elm Cottage" on the carriage shown here.

In later years, the station was used as a post office. Jacob was appointed postmaster of Witham Station in 1886 and ran the post office until he retired in 1889. In 1894, his daughter Elsie and her husband Fred Sanborn took over the station and ran it until they sold it to Joseph A. Bennett of Bridgton in 1901.

In 1932, the station was moved to the corner of Swamp Road "to accommodate Camp Accomac and Camp Wabunaki and the mail carrier at Hillside, saving the mail carrier two miles on each trip," as reported in the *Bridgton News*.



Bennett Cottage



June 2023

Joseph A. Bennett purchased the Witham land from Jacob's daughter Elsie Sanborn in 1901 and built this two-story cottage with a double porch. Bennett served in many managerial positions in the B&SRRR from its inception until his resignation in 1916. He was known as the "boss" of the railroad. In 1902 he hosted a 50th birthday party at the cottage, inviting many well-known Bridgton society folks and arranging for a train to carry them to and from Bridgton. The picture of the guests was printed in the *Bridgton News* that week.

The Bennetts sold the property in 1920 to Henry Mollenhauer of Queens, New

York City. Henry's father was an engineer on the Long Island Railroad and must have felt very comfortable spending his summers in retirement along the Narrow Gauge. Henry was a real estate broker and built many cottages in the area with a distinctive hip roof during his 35 years here.

After Henry's death in 1953, the family sold his property to George and Anna Pickering. George, known as "Pick," rented out the cottages. It has been sold several more times since then.

All of Bridgton's high society attended Bennett's birthday party. Bennett is the man seated on the porch at the right edge of the photo.



The Water Tower

July 2023



The railroad's water tower was located on the far side of the Bennett cottage and was filled from a natural spring across the road. A pipe running under the road filled a cistern in the tower. Steam engines, of course, depended on great quantities of water, and trains stopped here to replenish their tanks to keep the wheels turning.

Behind the water tower you can just barely see a second set of tracks running parallel to the main track. This was the siding that allowed trains to pass if one was stopped at the tower.



August 2023

Capitol City

In 1923, Joseph Bennett sold a parcel of his land to William Henry Harrison Allen. Allen, a Bridgton native, made a career building railroads in the Midwest and Washington DC, where he constructed the Million Dollar Bridge on Connecticut Avenue. He built this cottage, and also a bowling alley, high on the hill behind the Bennett cottage. He named his place "Capitol City," presumably after the years he had spent in DC.

Allen's health began to fail in the 1930s, and the property was abandoned. After it was sold, Franklin Irish was hired to tear the buildings down. Franklin used materials from Capitol City to build himself a cottage, as well as other cottages along the shoreline.



Although you can't read it in this photo, the sign on the porch reads "Capitol City." The sign was donated to the Historical Society and hangs in the museum.



The Capitol City bowling alley was built next to the house and was unique for the area. When it was dismantled in 1946, the highly polished flooring was used to lay the floors in Merle Douglass' new home on the pond.

Mackey Cottage

The Capitol City land was sold to Jay A. Mackey in 1945. Mackey was an executive with the Singer Sewing Machine Company, who had first come to Sebago in 1924 to summer at the Irish's Hillside farm. At the time he said, "I'll only be here one summer - I never go back to the same place twice." But he must have been very taken with the area, for he came back again and again for 21 years before buying his own land. In 1946 he had Franklin Irish build him a cottage on the site of the Allen's boathouse, using materials from the old Capitol City cottage.

Mackey sold land on either side of his cottage to Franklin and Helen Irish. They erected cottages on the sites and kept the one called "Irish One" for themselves.



"Irish One" today

September 2023



The cottage was expanded in 1990, adding a basement and a second story. Claire Irish, daughter-in-law of Franklin and wife of Dick Irish, lives there now.

*Franklin Irish and
Jay Mackey*



October 2023

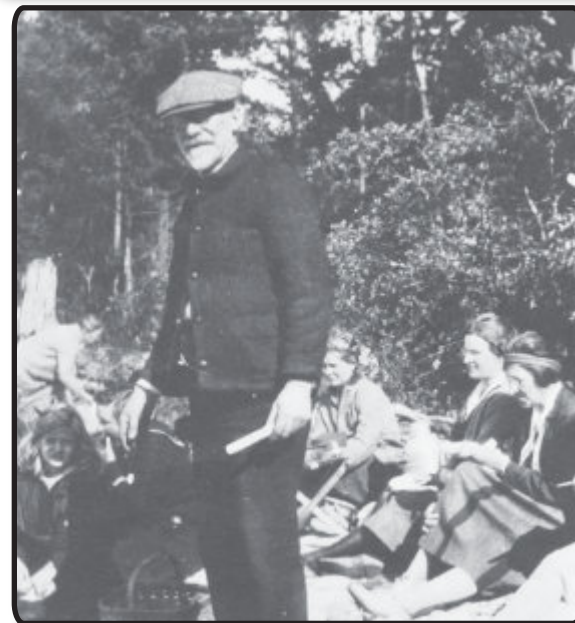
Asa Weeman

When Sebago acquired the Hillside area from Denmark in 1830, it also acquired the families of Abraham York and John Weeman, who both had property there. The two families intermarried, and land was passed back and forth between family members throughout the rest of the century. In 1879, Tryphena (York) Weeman deeded her land to her youngest son Asa in exchange for support and maintenance for herself and husband John Weeman Jr. during their old age. She died in 1892, leaving Asa in possession of a large parcel of land along the edge of Hancock Pond.

The well-known Dr William Blackman, who had built a summer cottage on Douglas Hill in 1892, and was later to build the stone tower at the top of the mountain, became interested in Asa's property. The story of how he acquired it was told by Emily Welch at Blackman's 70th birthday party in 1926: "Twenty years ago a lady saw this spot and sought the farmer [Asa Weeman] who owned it to make a bargain for it. All went well until in looking the property over, they came to a stretch of sandy beach along the lake shore. 'My neighbors,' said the farmer, 'have always used this sand for building when they wanted to and I'd kind o' hate to think they couldn't do it any more.' 'Well, I'm afraid you'll have to,' the lady replied. 'If I buy this land I certainly am not going to have people running all over it.' 'Well,' drawled the farmer slowly, 'I guess it ain't for sale,' and adamant he remained in spite of all her protestations. Later came our doctor and saw its camping possibilities and he interviewed the farmer. There was a repetition of the scene until his reply was awaited. And it was this: 'Why, they'll be my neighbors, too. Of course they'll be welcome.' And so the campers are there today."



*Above:
Elmer and Lena
Weeman at Asa
Weeman's farm on
Swamp Road*



*Left:
Dr Blackman,
Camp Wabunaki's
"fairy godfather"*

Camp Wabunaki



Stone pillars marking the entrance to the causeway still stand today. Girls are wearing the early camp uniform of voluminous bloomers and middy blouses.



Wabunaki lodge, 1937, built in classic camp style. Later used as the infirmary.

November 2023

Dr. Blackman's purchase, which included "The Island" just off the shoreline and the causeway leading to it, was made in 1905. His friend, Frank Wright, who was later to build a summer place on Wright's Point, opened a boys' camp named Wabunaki on the land and ran it until 1909. In 1910 it became a camp for girls under the direction of Miss Amy Dunlap. She advertised it for girls 11-18, and could accept up to 18 campers at a time. Girls who were not known to Miss Dunlap were expected to provide references. Campers stayed for all of July and August, for a fee of \$200. The girls slept in canvas wall tents raised on wooden platforms and ate at the central lodge called the Bungalow.

In 1921, Miss Emily Welch took over management of the camp, and under her direction the camp increased in size and reputation. During the 20s, Dr Blackman bought more land that helped it grow. In 1923 he acquired the parcel extending north along the shore to the Sebago-Denmark town line from Elmer Weeman (son of Asa), and more along the shore in Denmark from Girard and William Berry. Further purchases of Weeman land over the next decade brought the camp to about 300 acres, with a mile of shorefront. On the Denmark shore, Miss Welch established a camp called Puk-Wabunaki for younger girls, while the older girls occupied the original campground on the Island in Sebago. Together the camps could accommodate about 100 campers.

The "Red Cottage," which had been built in 1908 by James Williams on a piece of Asa Weeman's land just north of Bennett's, was purchased by Miss Welch in 1925 for her own use. She remained a constant summer resident there until late in her life. In the 1950 she sold the greater part of her land back to Merle and Barbara Weeman.

December 2023

Camp 'Wabunaki cont'd



Emily Welch, 1927

Miss Welch became prominent in the camping movement of the 1920s and '30s, and the philosophy and practice she developed at Wabunaki influenced camps throughout the East and Midwest. Her girls, she said, came to camp to "build up their soul's fabric." The girls themselves may have had less lofty ambitions; their accounts of camp life are lively, full of fun and hijinks. They all fondly remember arriving at camp on "The Dinky," their nickname for the Narrow Gauge train.

The Weeman family remained connected to the camp throughout its heyday. Lena Weeman, wife of Elmer, was an institution in herself as camp cook for decades, sometimes helped by her daughter-in-law Barbara and granddaughter Linda. Her son Merle was a handyman there, and a favorite of the girls, who all had crushes on him!

Dr Blackman died in 1943. In his will, he urged his heirs to continue leasing the land to Miss Welch on favorable terms. They extended the lease for four years, which carried the camp through the 1948 season. In December of that year, the land and all the camp buildings and equipment were sold, then sold again in 1950 to Charles and Mildred Leader. The Leaders ran the camp through the '50s, but it closed for good in 1963, and the land was sold off in pieces.



Lena Weeman at the door of the camp kitchen, 1930.

Merle Weeman and fish, about 1967.





Engine No. 6 at the Water Tower

Coming for 2024 Convene Neighborhood

*If you have pictures and stories to share of your family's home in the last century, please contact a member of the Sebago Historical Society, send a comment to our Facebook page or email us through the Contact page of our website
www.sebagohistoricalsociety.org*



The Calendar Committee, Sue Cummings, Nancy Sosman and Sherrill Brown, would like to thank all those who invited us into their homes and opened their photo albums, telling us the stories behind the pictures. A special thank you to June Allen for her personal knowledge of this area and the folks who lived there.

All information is as accurate as can be determined at the time of printing.