OSSIPEE LAKE REPORT

Volume 5, Issue 4 • October – December 2006

SAVING THE WHITTIER COVERED BRIDGE

WEST OSSIPEE — The Whittier Covered Bridge was closed to cars 17 years ago but that didn't stop the flow of traffic.

As one of only 50 surviving covered spans in the state, it has continued to draw a steady stream of visitors who stop to picnic, take pictures or drop a canoe into the Bearcamp River for a leisurely trip to Ossipee Lake.

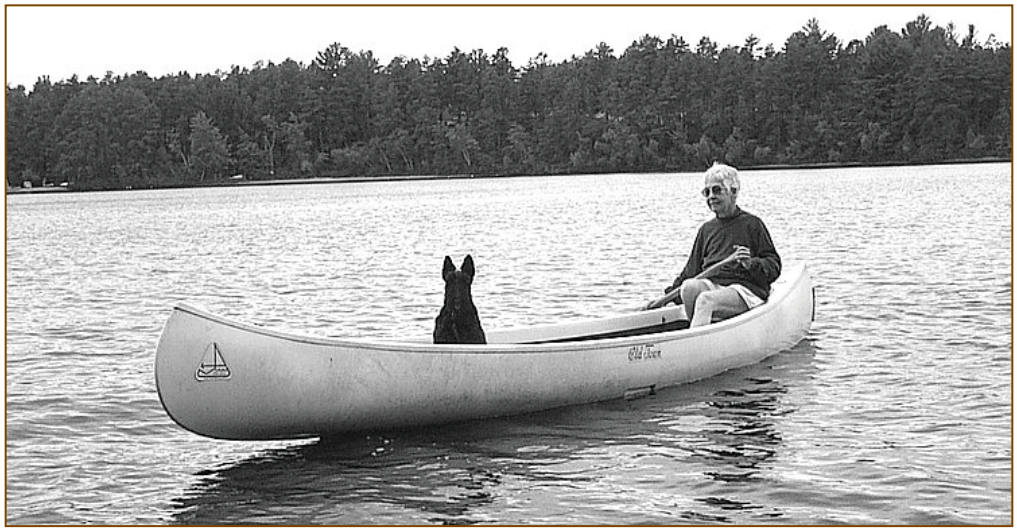
Now, despite its popularity the town-owned bridge is in crisis. Holes pock the roof and siding and rot has destroyed 20 feet of a horizontal load-bearing beam. Repairs are urgently needed – both immediate work at a high cost and long-term restoration at an even higher cost.

With the final bill likely to top $700,000, concerns over who will pay have been joined by questions about how such a visible symbol of our past could have deteriorated to the point where it's unclear whether it can survive the coming winter.

Rescue Team Formed

Peter Olkkola is a three-term Ossipee Selectman who is running for County Commissioner. He also heads a task force charged with assessing the options for saving the bridge. On the campaign trail, shaking hands and attending meetings, the bridge is never far from his mind.

Continued on page 3



North Broad Bay resident Louise Anderson and her Scotty, Ferguson, enjoy an autumn afternoon canoe trip near Camp Huckins' Loon Island. *Alliance Photo*

KEEPING WATCH OVER GREEN MOUNTAIN

EFFINGHAM — Three trails run up Green Mountain and countless vacationers, campers and residents have made the trek to its 1,907 ft. summit one of the area's most popular day hikes.

The reason for its popularity is apparent on the final rise to the top as the overhanging trees give way to an open sky fronted by a superstructure of windows, wood and steel. It's the Green Mountain Lookout – a fire tower, as most of us would call it – whose keepers have kept watch over the surrounding landscape for more than 80 years.

The tower's current keeper is Rolland Libby, better known as Harry, who works for the state and holds the title Lookout Watchman.

He's part of an early fire detection and warning system that reflects the fact that forests cover 84% of the state and contribute $5 billion to the state's economy through recreation and forest products.

From his perch above the trees, Libby has spent more than a decade looking for smoke in the vast landscape of valleys and mountains that stretches in all directions.

Continued on page 2

KEY DATES:

- Saturday, October 14: Public information meeting on the Alliance's 'History of Ossipee Lake' book project. Barry Hill, speaker. Calumet Conference Center, Freedom, 9AM. Info @ 914-588-3280.
- Thursday, November 2: Public meeting of the Ossipee Watershed Coalition to document significant resources and prioritize planning. Steve Whitman, facilitator. Runnells Hall, Chocorua, 7-9PM. Info @ 603-539-1859.

CONTACT US:

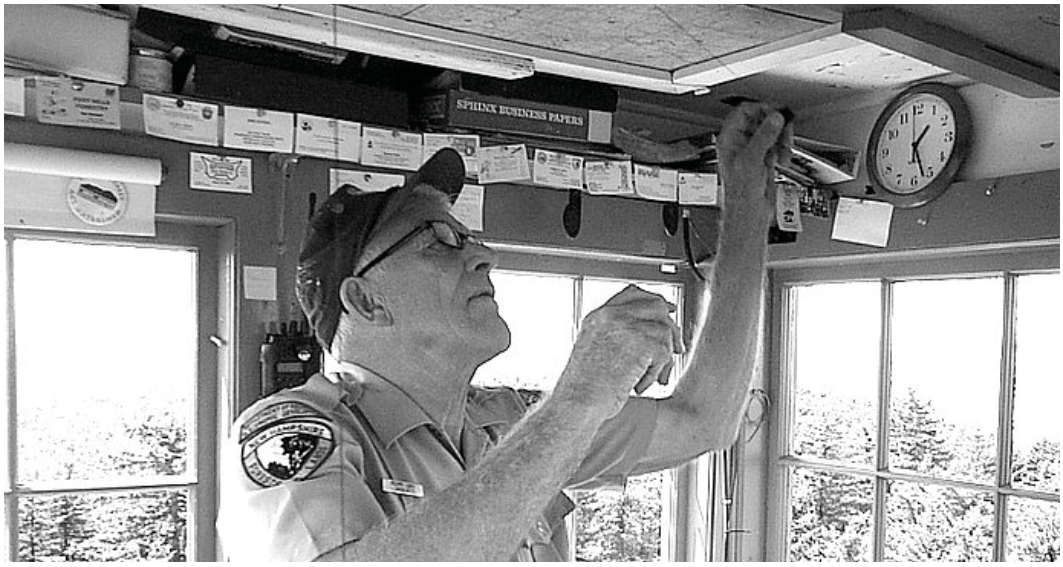
OSSIPEE LAKE ALLIANCE
PO Box 173
Freedom, NH 03836

info@ossipeelake.org
Phone: 914-588-3280
Fax: 509-271-3838

OSSIPEE LAKE, BROAD BAY, LEAVITT BAY, BERRY BAY, AND DANFORTH POND

David Smith, Executive Director
Susan Marks, Development Director
June D'Andrea, Program Coordinator

KEEPING WATCH OVER GREEN MOUNTAIN



High Tech and Low: Lookout Watchman Harry Libby triangulates the location of smoke with a device made in 1922, then uses a cell phone to call emergency personnel. *Alliance Photo*

Continued from page 1

On the September day we visited, giant dragonflies swooped in circles between the tower and the small cabin that provides shelter in storms and a place to bunk.

Unlike past generations of watchmen, Libby isn't required to be in residence full-time during the fire season, from late March through early November, but he stays put for part of the time anyhow.

"I'll stay here if it's a very dry season," he says. "I also try to come up here for the fourth of July because I can watch fireworks in dozens of towns in two states at the same time."

Constructed in Maine

The Green Mountain tower was built on Cedar Mountain in Maine but was taken down and relocated to its current site in 1922. The tower's wooden "cab" originally sat high above the treetops at 47 feet off the ground, but it tended to sway in strong winds and was lowered to 39 feet in 1977.

"It's very safe but it still sways a bit," Libby says. "When the wind blows more than 20 miles per hour I have to move everything away from the window ledges."

The tower's telephone line came down in a 1998 ice storm but wasn't replaced because it was redundant to the two-way radios and cell phone that are used to communicate with fire personnel on the ground and in other towers. When Libby spots smoke, an ancient compass-like device and faded ceiling map help him triangulate the precise location.

"I have the best in modern and 1922 technology," he jokes as the radio crackles with a report from another tower.

Repeat Visitors

Thanks to this year's abundant rainfall there have only been ten fires compared to three times that many in 2005. It's been a banner year for wildlife, however, with spottings of bears, eagles and a thirsty moose.

"The only water on the summit is in the rain barrel at the cabin. I had a moose come by and knock the screen off and have a nice long drink."

By Labor Day weekend, more than 800 visitors had passed through to savor the view, hunt for wild berries and sign the watchman's log. With the busiest part of the year yet to come, Libby thinks the final tally this year will be more than 1,400. Many of them will return.

"This is a place people come back to. The local schools bring their kids up each year and some of the teachers tell me how they used to come up here when they were kids. Now they're back as adults with the next generation."

OSSIPEE LAKE REPORT:

Writer & Editor: David Smith
Design Services: Design Monsters

Send mailing address changes to info@ossipeelake.org or PO Box 173, Freedom NH 03836.

OSSIPEE LAKE NEWS delivers free up to the minute information about the lake by e-mail, as events warrant. Sign up @ www.ossipeelake.org/email.

The Alliance is a member of the New Hampshire Lakes Association (www.nhlakes.org).

SAVING THE HISTORIC WHITTIER COVERED BRIDGE

Continued from page 1

"It's an important part of the history of our town," he says. "If it means taking the funding issue to Town Meeting next spring, I'm ready to make the case for saving this part of our heritage."

Ossipee resident Bob Gillette, who is also on the task force, agrees with Olkkola about the importance of the bridge but worries Town Meeting may be too late. He says bridge specialists have told him one severe winter might be all it takes to bring it down.

To prevent that from happening, Gillette says the bridge must be protected from the elements and stabilized until a restoration plan can be created. The initial preventative costs alone, however, could exceed $100,000 and the selectmen disagree over whether they can authorize such an expense since the bridge is not specifically covered in the town budget.

One of Only Ten

One thing on which everyone agrees is that the bridge is significant. Built in what is known as the New Hampshire Paddleford Truss style, it is one of only ten such bridges known to exist. In addition to being listed in the Department of Interior's National Register of Historic Places, it is Ossipee's oldest town-owned structure. A sign at the site designates it an "Ossipee Historic Monument."

Whittier Bridge takes its name, like the adjacent mountain, from poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who spent summers here in the 1800s. Thanks largely to the efforts of a more recent summer resident, Gordon Pope, the span was restored and rededicated in 1983.

Just six years later, however, concerns about its load-bearing capacity led town officials to close it. Cut off from traffic and out of sight from the main roads, it was neglected and vandalized.

Gillette is pragmatic about the situation.

"It's not unusual for a historic structure like this one to experience a period of decline before the community recognizes the urgency and acts," he says.

Olkkola agrees that the bridge has been a municipal orphan and he wants long-term funding for the span to be clarified. He says the last work on the structure was in 2003 when International Paper donated lumber to patch the siding, adding that town officials began discussing the bridge with consultants a year ago after realizing the seriousness of the situation.

Ossipee's most important historic monument is in danger of collapse. *Alliance Photo*

Just before Labor Day, Ossipee's selectmen ruled the bridge poses a public safety hazard and announced plans to close it to pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Next Steps

As for what comes next, Gillette says one possibility is to apply for a grant from the Federal Highway Administration's National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program, which the towns of Conway and Jackson have successfully tapped to maintain their covered bridges. Even if Ossipee's application were successful, however, money would not be available from that program until 2008.

Moreover, a grant will only cover 80% of the cost, leaving the town to fund 20% of the restoration as well as the near-term expense of preventing the span from collapsing before a restoration plan can be created. A long-term maintenance plan, such as an endowment supported by local fund-raising, will also have to be proposed as part of the grant application process.

"There's grant money available for emergency repairs to historic structures like this one," Gillette says, "but the people who write the checks are going to want to know what the town's plan is to prevent such a situation from happening again."

LAKE HISTORY PLANNED

At press time, Ossipee Lake Alliance was preparing to announce that it will join Ossipee historian Barry Hill to begin research for a book on the history of Ossipee Lake.

Many volunteers will be needed for this multi-year project. Want to know more? Plan to attend our public information meeting. The day and time are listed under Key Events on the first page of this newsletter.

"It's not unusual for a historic structure like this one to decline before the community recognizes the urgency and acts."

REMEMBERING SHAWTOWN: FREEDOM'S LOST NEIGHBORHOOD

By Carol Foord

Courtesy of the Carroll County Independent

FREEDOM — New Hampshire's woods are haunted by cellar holes, the last remnants of former towns which were abandoned as settlers were lured to farm the more fertile soil of the Midwest in the mid- to late-1800s or to work in the mills.

It is said that New Hampshire by the mid-1800s was 80 percent unforested, and today it is just the opposite. Within the last year, through vigorous efforts of the Friends of Trout Pond, over 2,500 acres of land, mostly in Freedom, were purchased for preservation in perpetuity.

The land includes the undeveloped portion of the Ossipee Plains (also known as the Pine Barrens); all of Trout Pond (a high elevation pond); Black Brook (Tom Andrews Brook); Shawtown Brook and parts of the Oak Hills known today as Blazo and Stacy Mountains; a part of Huckins Hill; and all of Mary's Mountain, including an abandoned neighborhood at its base known as Shawtown.

Mary's Mountain is named after Mary Shaw, great-granddaughter of the pioneer settler Noah Shaw Sr., for whom Shawtown is named. Shawtown is the name given to a school district that once thrived in the shadow of this hill. One of ten Freedom neighborhood districts, Shawtown was first settled in the early 1830s and abandoned before the turn of that century.

All that lingers is a series of fieldstone cellar holes, a small graveyard, and the crude remnants of a schoolhouse foundation. Those who find these stoneworks are intrigued by the mystery surrounding this once thriving community. The question begs to be asked: Who were these people? What happened?

As you read, keep in mind that Freedom was a part of Effingham until 1831, and Madison was a part of Eaton until 1852.

Revealing Shawtown's Mysteries

Like the fieldstone cellars hiding in today's forests, early records of Shawtown are hard to find. Piecing together Shawtown's story is like trying to make a quilt from torn antique lace doilies: no matter what threads are researched, some won't connect and big holes remain.

Shawtown's story begins in the Mountain District of Northwood, where Noah Shaw grew up. After his first wife, Lydia Drew, died in 1807 he married his cousin, Sarah Durgin, of Effingham. The couple lived in Northwood, where she gave birth to their son, Ira, in 1810.

Noah Shaw's name last appears in Northwood records in 1820. It appears next in Effingham records in 1822 when his poll tax was abated, suggesting that he, Sarah and Ira had moved to Effingham that year.

Why did they leave Northwood? Sarah's large family lived in Effingham and Northwood's Mountain District was fully settled, cleared of trees and now crowded. Noah's father, Joseph Shaw, a Revolutionary War "wagonner," likely intended that his elder son John inherit the family farm at his death in 1842. It was for Noah to secure his own family's future somewhere else, so Noah, Sarah and Ira moved to Effingham.

During their first 10 years in Effingham, the Shaws likely lived with Sarah's family — the Durgins — on Durgin Hill, where she and her many siblings had been raised. Her parents, Joseph and Sally [Huckins] Durgin, had originally come from Northwood. Ira would have attended the Durgin Hill district school.

Vast Land Sale

Meanwhile, from about 1800 to 1821 or so, more than one hundred 100-acre lots were made available for sale in a gore of land — a vast area comprising the Ossipee Plains and the Oak Hills (now the Stacy, Blazo and Mary's Mountain region).

Newcomers and investors came from Maine and New Hampshire to buy up this virgin land. Amos Towle, Sr. (1770-1853), a tavern owner from Hollis, Maine, moved to Effingham with his family in 1810. Towle had the futures of seven sons and two daughters to consider and he invested in land in the gore. By 1821, when the gore was incorporated into Effingham, a young lumber baron by the name of Ellis B. Usher, also from Hollis, bought 5,000 acres of gore land, mostly in the Plains. After that purchase, there was little virgin land available for sale in Effingham.

From 1822 to 1832 there are no further records of Noah Shaw. The first mention of Shaw was in 1832 when Freedom, now separated from Effingham, was divided into five school districts.

The town clerk listed Freedom inhabitants by district, with notes about how much land settlers had cleared thus far. Four polls were listed in District 5, an expansive district encompassing the Ossipee Plains and Mary's Mountain. These were Joseph Copp, Thomas Howard and Tom Andrews 2nd, all situated on the Plains bordering Ossipee Lake, and Noah

Continued on page 7

ARCTIC WEATHER, DESERT CLIMES PART OF LIFE IN THE NORTH COUNTRY

FREEDOM — Did you know that the temperature at the bottom of the lake is the same in mid-winter as it is in mid-summer?

Did you know that migrating birds use the stars to navigate; or that in scientific terms our area in winter is considered a desert climate?

Those are just some of the fun facts that educator-naturalist Chris Lewey offered as he entertainingly navigated his way from the top of Mount Washington to the shores of Ossipee Lake in his "North Country Summer" slide show presentation on August 5th.

The 'Tales of Ossipee Lake' event was co-sponsored by the Alliance and Calumet Conference Center as part of Freedom Old Home Week.

Just as man has learned to adapt to Mount Washington's arctic-like conditions, Lewey said, so too have plants like the alpine flowers that carpet the peak each spring in defiance of some of the world's worst weather.

Here's another Lewey fact: every 1,000 foot gain in elevation in our area is comparable to moving 250 miles north at the same elevation. That means if you travel from sea level in Portland to the top of 6,288 ft. Mount Washington, the change in vegetation is the equivalent of traveling up the coast from Portland for 1,500 miles.

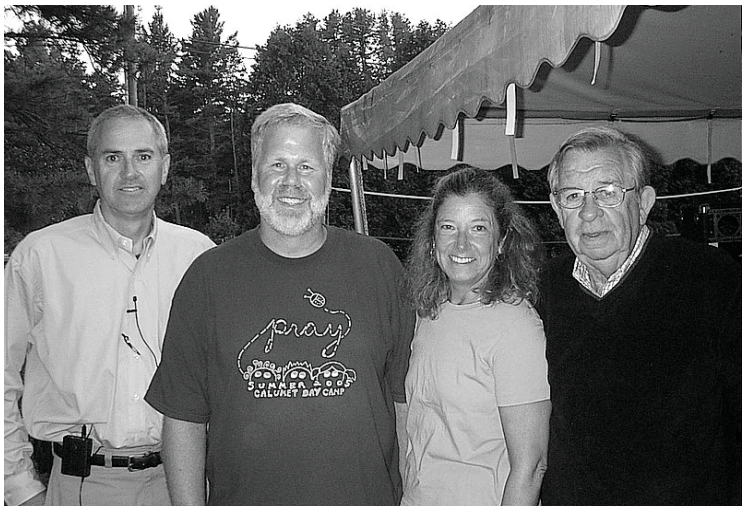
"Roughly speaking," he said, "that would put you at the Arctic Circle."

Adventure Travel

Lewey is founder and executive director of RAVEN, a Chatham, New Hampshire organization offering interpretive wildlife programs and travel adventures, including night visits to Mount Washington and annual Memorial Day bird-watching trips to Monhegan Island. The organization's activities are listed online at www.ravenwildlife.com.

Speaking with us after the program, Lewey discussed his life "off the grid" in Chatham. Gas lights, a gas stove and a gas refrigerator are the order of the day, with a wind generator in the works for back-up energy during winter.

"It's a good thing I love living this way," he said. "My place is so remote that connecting to electric power would be pretty much out the question."



Chris Lewey, far left, at his Tales of Ossipee Lake presentation with Paul Lindahl of Calumet, and Susan Marks and Howard Bouve of the Alliance. *Alliance Photo*

MORE MILFOIL PULLED

OSSIPEE — Professional divers were back in the water this summer to harvest invasive milfoil in Phillips Brook, Leavitt Bay, Portsmouth Cove and Danforth Pond.

Under the Alliance's direction, Ossipee Lake has become one of the state's main test sites for establishing whether pulling weeds out by the roots can be as effective a control method as chemical treatments.

While the state considers most chemical treatments to be safe, the close proximity of wells to treatment areas often makes diving the only alternative. Ossipee officials turned to Maine-based New England Milfoil last year after chemicals failed to stop milfoil from spreading from Phillips Brook to the western shore of Leavitt Bay.

The new round of harvesting was approved after New England Milfoil's founder, Cliff Cabral, and the Alliance's Susan Marks reported to state and local officials that approximately 25% of the milfoil in Phillips Brook and 5% of the plants in the area where it enters Leavitt Bay re-grew this summer.

Marks said the early results were encouraging, but she cautioned that it will be years before conclusions can be drawn about diving's success rate as compared to chemicals.

"Every 1,000 foot gain in elevation in our area is comparable to moving 250 miles north at the same elevation."

INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF OSSIPEE LAKE

It's New Hampshire's best north country lake for fishing, boating and swimming. Home of the state's finest remaining examples of unique habitats. The location of one of your most important real estate investments. It's Ossipee Lake, and there's only one organization dedicated to preserving and protecting it: Ossipee Lake Alliance. **Please invest in the future of your lake by joining us.**

DONOR LEVELS

- ☐ FRIEND $10–19
- ☐ SUPPORTER..... $20–49
- ☐ SPONSOR..... $50–99
- ☐ PATRON $100–249
- ☐ GUARDIAN $250–499
- ☐ BENEFACTOR $500–999
- ☐ CHAMPION ..... $1,000+

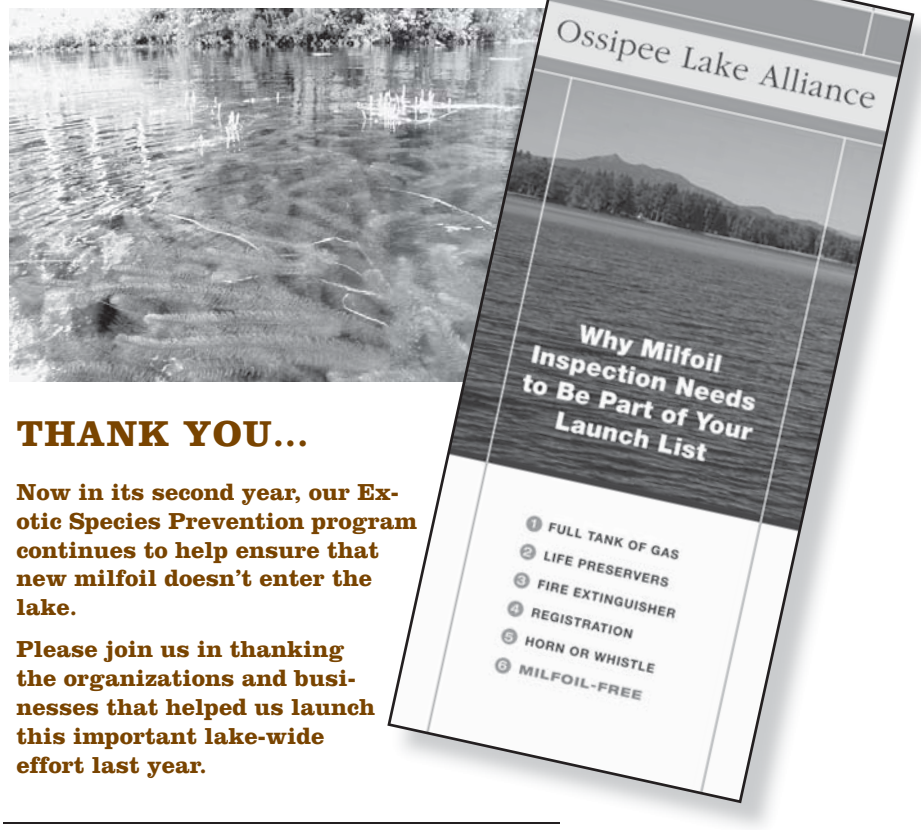
NAME

PERMANENT ADDRESS

LAKE ADDRESS

EMAIL

SEND TO:
OSSIPEE LAKE ALLIANCE
PO BOX 173
FREEDOM, NH 03836



THANK YOU...

Now in its second year, our Exotic Species Prevention program continues to help ensure that new milfoil doesn't enter the lake.

Please join us in thanking the organizations and businesses that helped us launch this important lake-wide effort last year.

Town of Freedom
Town of Ossipee

Effingham Conservation Commission
Freedom Conservation Commission
Ossipee Conservation Commission

Berry Bay Association
Broad-Leavitt Bay Association
Calumet Conference Center & Camp Calumet
Camp Robin Hood
Danforth Bays Camping Resort
Deer Cove Condominium Association
Freedom Village Condominiums
Indian Mound Property Owners Association
Lakefront Landing Marina & Campground
Lakeview Lot Owners Association
Leavitt Bay South Shore Association
Loon Lake of Freedom Association
Mountview Property Owners Association
North Broad Bay Association
Ossipee Bluffs Association
Ossipee Lake Camping Area
Pine Landing Beach Club
Totem Pole Park Campground
Ward's Boat Shop
Westward Shores Marina

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services

STRANGE TALE OF 'LOST' FREEDOM COMMUNITY

Continued from page 4

Shaw, alone in the Oak Hills. Freedom's first record indicates that Shaw owned two oxen and a cow but had no buildings yet. Thus, until at least 1832, the Shaws must have remained on Durgin Hill. Son Ira would have been 22 and on his own by then.

While no deed was registered, it is likely that Noah acquired his land from Amos Towle, Jr., oldest child and namesake of the tavern owner. Shaw's lot lay in the hinterland of the Oak Hills, a rock-strewn mile from the terminus of Goe Hill Road in Eaton where five pioneer families were already settled.

Roads and Neighborhoods

As a condition of ownership, Towle likely required the pioneer to build a road from the Tamworth Road (Ossipee Lake Road today), traversing Towle's land and thereby benefiting Towle, all the way up to Shaw's Lot No. 98, a distance of three miles.

Towle may have also required that Shaw clear Towle's land before clearing his own and prepare the cut pine logs for the spring river drives down the Ossipee River to Saco River sawmills in Hollis, Maine.

In contrast to the gentle slope of "Towle's Knoll," Shaw's acreage was located in a steep, boulder-strewn wilderness, as witnessed by the large glacial erratics found in some of the stonewalls in Shawtown.

By the time Noah Shaw was able to reside in a year-round dwelling in "Shawtown," his son Ira had married a cousin, Lovey Durgin of Freedom, about 1834. By 1840 there were six farmsteads listed in District 5, "Shawtown," including those of both Noah and his son Ira. Grandson Noah Shaw was born that year.

In 1846, Shaw's road was formally laid out all the way to the Eaton (then Madison) border, thus connecting a burgeoning Shawtown with the well-established Goe Hill Road neighborhood and points north. That same year Amos Towle, Jr., built a fine, large house for his son Ransellear and bride Carolyn (Gilman) Towle of Effingham on Towle's Knoll.

Because of its situation just off the new "thoroughfare," Towle may have intended that his son operate an inn and tavern. The young couple lived there only four years, as an aging Amos Towle, Sr., needed his grandson Ransellear's help in running the family's successful tavern in Freedom village.

The families that settled during the 1840s and 1850s were largely related to one another by marriage: Shaws to Huckins, Durgins, Wards, Grays and Stacys (the latter three from the Goe Hill settlement); Huckins to Durgins and Wards; Durgins and Tylers to Stokes.

By 1856 there were ten farmsteads in Shawtown, a graveyard (Sarah Huckins Shaw, wife of the pioneer, died in 1853 at 73) and 14 pupils attending the school. Ira Shaw's farmhouse was located on 50 acres in the heart of Shawtown, midway between his father's farm and Towle's Knoll. Both the school and the graveyard were situated on his land.

Farming Challenges

In 1855, widower Noah the Pioneer moved down with his son Ira, swapping places with Ira's eldest daughter, Olive Ann, who had married John Stacy of Goe Hill that year.

Stretching two miles from Towle's Knoll to the Dana family homestead near the Madison border, Shawtown was a healthy blend of school children, young couples and their babies, middle-aged folk and old-timers, as well as a Canadian (Anthony Dana) with a heavy French accent.

Farming the land in Shawtown was challenging: the area was overburdened with glacial till containing an abundance of sizable glacial erratics. In other words, the till could not be tilled with a wood and iron plow until these huge rocks were whittled down, hauled away and put to use.

Some resourceful Shawtown inhabitants turned to sheep farming and Mary's Mountain and Towle's Knoll were used as sheep pastures. Miles Huckins and Abram Tyler got into the lumber and logging business.

The women did their part, too: they sewed, raised bees and made butter and cheese to help make ends meet. They also made sure their children learned to read and write.

There were other economic challenges. Bounded by steep, rocky hills, a barren plain and the Danforth waterways, Shawtown in 1861 was isolated. It was five miles distant from three busy mill centers: Blaisdell's grist and lumber mills at East Madison, Freedom village with its shops and stores, and Effingham Falls, a vital crossroads with water-driven mills.

Here, on the powerful Ossipee River, were a sawmill, gristmill, woolen mill (where wool from Shawtown sheep may have been sold), bedstead factory, as well as a blacksmith, schoolhouse and Freewill Baptist Church.

Next Issue: In part two of this four-part series, the Civil War takes its toll on the thriving community of Shawtown.

Historian, naturalist and author Carol Foord lives in Freedom.

"Farming the land in Shawtown was challenging: the area was overburdened with glacial till containing an abundance of glacial erratics."

OSSIPEE LAKE ALLIANCE
PO BOX 173
FREEDOM, NH 03836

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
WHITE PLAINS, NY
PERMIT NO.346

OSSIPEE LAKE REPORT - AUTUMN 2006

INSIDE:

Preserve. Protect. Educate.