

A History of
Wenham Lake

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Jack E. Hauck



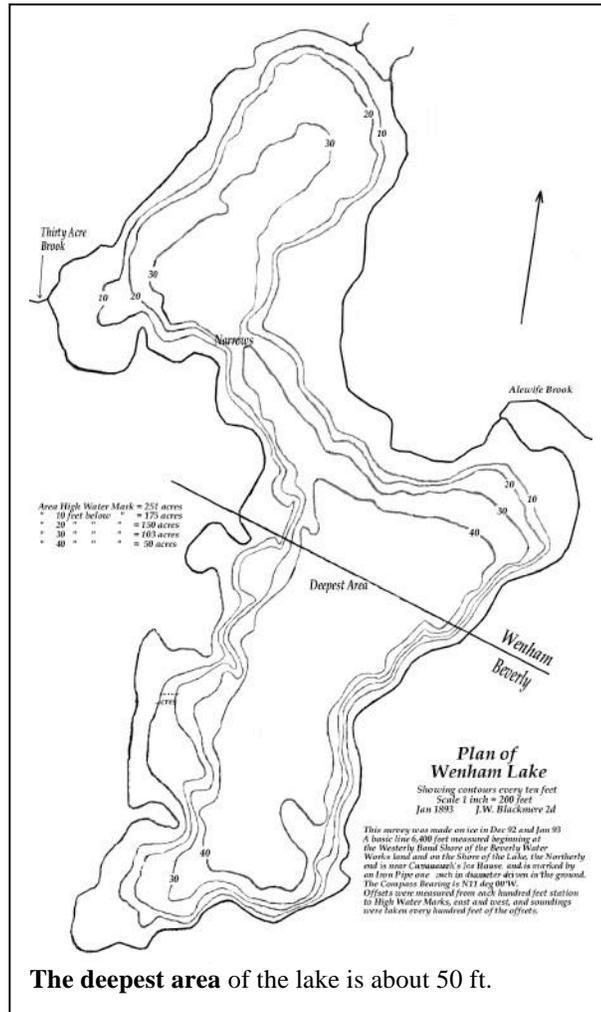
Wenham Lake, circa 1937. with water-purification plant at lower right.
Photo Fairchild Aerial Surveys

WENHAM LAKE

There are five ponds in Wenham: Pleasant Pond, Muddy Pond, Cedar Pond, Coy's Pond and the Great Pond or Wenham Lake, which is the largest. It now is about 320 acres, in surface area. Most – nearly 70% -- of the lake is in Wenham, the rest is in Beverly. (*The Salem/Beverly Water Board owns 487.21 acres, in Wenham, about one-tenth of the town's land. The Salem-Beverly Water Supply Board is obligated to make a payment-in-lieu of tax (PILOT) to the Town of Wenham, based on the value of the land it holds. In 2006, the Water Supply Board paid Wenham less than \$10,000.*)

The Wenham Lake we see today is very different from what it was, when the European settlers came, at the start of the 17th century. What we see, today, is beautiful; what they saw was spectacular.

Wenham Lake was formed, during the last ice age. The lake is a basin, carved by the glacier, in the area's sienite-rock shelf. As the glacier receded, it left a deposit of sand, pebbles and huge boulders. A number of springs feed the lake. One in "Dodge's Cove" (*aka Doctor's Cove*) is quite noticeable, when the lake level is low.



Along both the east and west sides of the Great Pond are moraines formed by debris left when the glacier receded. These low-lying ridges consist of soil and large boulders.

The shape of the lake is, it being almost divided into two nearly equal parts. (Before the water level was raised, by the building of a dam, the narrow area must have been more pronounced.) The length runs somewhat from NNW to SSE, and is about 6,400 ft (1.2 miles) long. The lake's outlet (Alewife Brook) is 34 f.t higher, than the flow of the tide up the Ipswich River. The shores, in some places, are steep, but generally gracefully sloping to the water's edge.

The size of the lake was enlarged in 1872, when a low dam was built, at the outlet to Alewife Brook. Town records of Jan. 5, report, "by a judicious expenditure of \$4,050, for flowage damages to parties owning low lands about the lake, and a very slight expenditure, at the outlet, in the spring, building a temporary dam to hold up the water fourteen inches higher, the capacity of the lake was increased, and secures to us within the reach of our pumps, 150,000,000 gallons of water more than before.

A dashboard was added to allow an outflow (*spillway*). Removing the dashboard, for a short time each day during late spring, allowed the alewife to return to the salt water. (The dashboard is long gone: no mention of when it was permanently removed.)²

So, where is Alewife Brook today?

Sadly, what is left is buried beneath the Main Street roadway. Also gone is Wenham Pond Bridge, under which Alewife Brook once freely flowed.

On the western side of the lake, at about the midpoint, there is a short projection of the shore, which is called Butler's Island. When the lake is at its height, the "island" is under water.

At the southwest side, there is a finger-like peninsula, which once was a small island. The island's shoreward end was filled in, about 1881.²

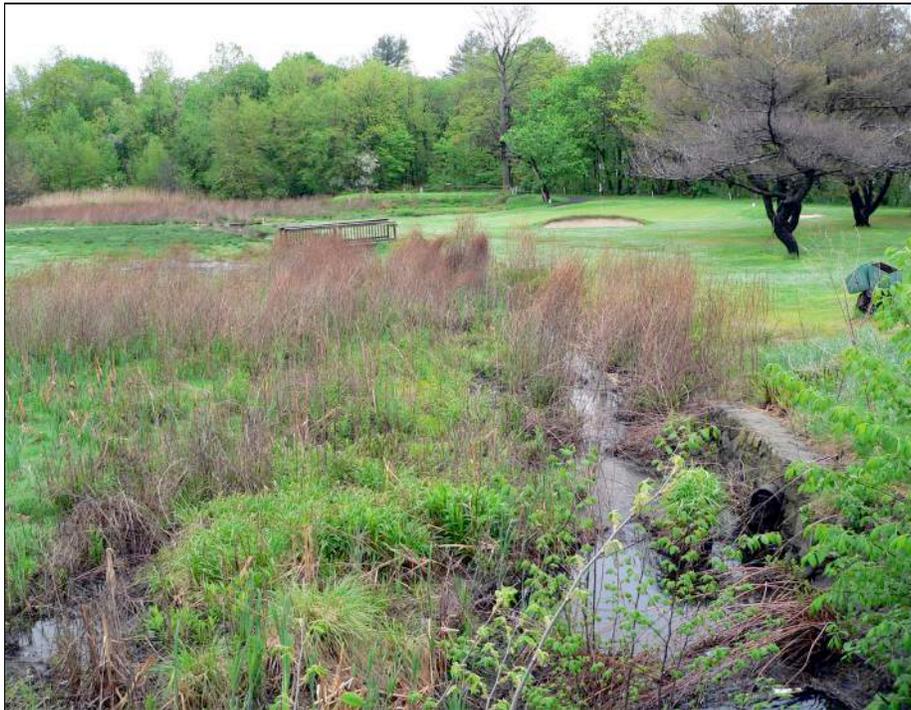
According to an 1891 survey, the greatest depth of the lake, when it was full, was about 50 ft. This area is about 450 ft. east of "Butler's Island." Today, with additional water being fed into the lake, the greatest depth likely is nearly 60 ft.

The "Narrows," 30 ft. deep when the lake is full, has a sand bar dividing the lake into two parts. In 1891, the lake, at high water, covered 250.6 acres. The greatest length was about 6,400 ft.

What we do not see, today, is the crystal clarity that once existed at the Great Pond.

Dr. John C. Phillips, recalling his childhood in the late 1800s, wrote, "How lovely, too, was that first black ice, so crystal smooth, over the weedy forest below it, that you could see the painted turtles running for cover as you skated over them."²





Alewife Brook once free-flowing, now is overgrown with weeds.
Photo J. Hauck, 2010.

Indians

When the settlers arrived, in the 1630s, the Beverly-Salem area was inhabited by the Naumkeag tribe, of the Massachusetts nation. Wenepoykin (*called Sagamore George by the settlers*), was their sachem (*sagamore or leader*). Wenepoykin's tribe was under the dominion of the Sagamores of Agawam.

The Naumkeag were nomadic, in nature. In the summer and winter, the Indians wisely moved their camps between pre-established locations. Summer camps were near the seacoast, or large ponds and lakes. The Indians had a longhouse for tribal meetings; for individual families, there were smaller, dome-shaped, and bark-covered lodges, called "weetues."

Winter camps were inland, for protection from cold ocean winds. At the Beverly end of Wenham Lake, there was a large camp. What we call Wenham Lake, the Indians likely called "michigamea," meaning Great Pond. One can readily appreciate how important, to the Indians, was this large, well-sheltered and easily navigable body of water, with its ample stock of fish, and frequented by animal game.

Early settlers

The first major reference to the Great Pond is in reference to a sermon preached, on its shore, by the Anglican clergyman, Hugh Peter, also often called "Peters." On the north side of this pond, there once was a low conical hill. On a Sunday morning, probably in 1638, in his sermon, Reverend Peter drew from John III, verse 23 (*In Ænon, near to Salim, because there was much water there.*) From this sermon, the area was initially called Enon, and the body of water, Enon Pond.

The conical knoll is said to have been about 35 ft. high. It was grassy and smooth on all sides, except the side facing the pond, which abruptly and sharply dropped down. Calling it a pulpit would seem to be quite appropriate.

In 1908, the people of Wenham placed a large boulder, with a plaque, recalling Reverend Peter's sermon. The boulder is an example of the boulders, which were carried far from their original ledge, by a glacier. This stone was removed from land bordering Wenham Lake, a short distance, to its present location.

In the 1630s, Salem made grants of five and ten acres each, around the Great Pond: the area was known as "The Old Planters Farms. Up to twenty families owned land, though few developed the land, at first. ²

Land around Enon Pond was quickly doled out by the town fathers. Town Records, of Nov. 1642, state, "The town granted to John Small ten acres of land at Enon on the west side of the great pond, to Robert Tuke five acres of land at the great pond, to Henry Reignolds, and John Boome five acres each at the great pond, and to William Allin, Robert Allin, Thomas West and Nathaniel Sallowes ten acres each at the great pond. It was also ordered that Jeffrey Massy should have at the great pond his twenty acres formerly granted." ⁹

Enon did not remain Enon, for long. When the town was incorporated, in 1643, "The General Court of Elections, held at Boston, ye 10th day of ye third month, Anno 1643. It ordered that "Enon shall be called Wenham." ⁹



In 1908, the people of Wenham placed a large boulder, with a plaque, recalling Reverend Hugh Peter's sermon, drawn from John III, verse 23. Photo J. Hauck, 2010

(Some confusion of dates may exist, since up to 1752, a Julian calendar, not today's Gregorian calendar, was used. By the Julian calendar, the first month of the year was March. Thus, "ye third month" was May.)

The settlers must have relied just as heavily upon the lake for food, as the Indians had. Samuel Maverick, in 1660, wrote Wenham is "seated about a great Lake or Pond that abounds with all manner of fresh fish." ²

The great ponds held a most important place. In 1641, the Body of Liberties stated, "Every inhabitant that is an house holder shall have free fishing and fowling in any great ponds ... within the precincts of the towne where they dwell, unless the free men of the Same Towne or the General Court have otherwise appropriated them, provided that this shall not be extended to give leave to any man to come upon other's properties without their leave." In 1649, under the General Laws and Liberties a "Great Pond" – michigamea -- was defined as any pond over ten acres, in size. Further, it was declared legal for any man to pass over another's land, in order to reach a Great Pond, for the purpose of fishing and fowling, so long as "they trespass not on any man's corn or meadow." ¹

For at least two hundred years, fish taken from the Great Pond served both as food and as fertilizer. However, concern arose, in 1798, about the amount of fish being taken. Voters decided against obstructions used to catch the spring run of fish, and limited the days when fish could be taken. Certain days were reserved for the "purpose of ketching alewife Fish," and fish could only be taken by a sein, at three specified locations. ²

The Indians were very dependent upon Alwewife, not only as a source of food, but as a fertilizer for the soil. The early settlers seem to have copied their example, and their chroniclers speak of the soil being "fished but every third year," and of "striking at every plant of corn a herring or two." ²

Fishing

Today, fishing is not allowed at Wenham Lake. The last time fishing was allowed in Wenham Lake was 1906. A law banned fishing, to ensure the purity of the water.

However, the Great Pond long was known to be "a great fishing hole." Many a well-known person came to fish the Great Pond. General Thomas Gage, last royal governor of the province, used to take his leisure on Wenham Lake, in "a pleasure barge," and most likely took many a fish from the Great Pond. Daniel Webster, who fished everywhere that he could, said that he would never forget Wenham Lake. ²

Alewives, in great numbers, once came up the river, to spawn in the pond. A dam, on Ipswich River, along with other obstructions, eventually entirely prevented their access. (*Early town records, as well as records*

kept by the reservoir superintendent, are full of complaints about problems associated with the alewife migrations.)

What a great cornucopia was the Great Pond. Many species of fish were in it, including: large and small mouth bass, red perch, yellow perch, white perch, pickerel, catfish and black bass. (*From 1928 to 1937, the State removed, from Wenham Lake, for stocking purposes: 2,419 bass, 135,113 white perch, 1,744 pickerel, 11,980 yellow perch, and 2,617 catfish -- horned pout. These were placed in near-by ponds.* ²)

In June 1879, the State stocked Wenham Lake with about 15,000 Land Locked Salmon. However, the fish did not take to the lake and, gradually, died off. ¹⁰

Not only was there a plentiful bounty of fish to catch, but also there was great bait: fresh water clams were very plentiful, along the shores.

Dr. John C. Phillips, in his book, *Wenham's Great Pond*, lamented "Dear, dear, how much the modern boy might miss, if he only knew enough of history, to realize what has gone before! But what's the use of telling him about things that, in retrospect, seem important merely to aging memories, but ridiculous to younger minds attuned to a hundred new experiences." ²

Today, the only fishing at Wenham Lake is done by eagles.



Daniel Webster, who fished everywhere that he could, said that he would never forget Wenham Lake. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum.

Birds

Drive past Wenham Lake, these days, and you, very likely, will see many Canada Geese swimming about. They have become permanent residents. Occasionally, ducks – mallards mainly, but sometimes a few wood – will be seen by the careful eye, as well as the aforementioned eagles. During their migration periods, osprey frequent the lake.

Dr. John C. Phillips, who wrote the four-volumes about ducks, *The Natural History of Ducks*, said the shores attracted many birds “that would not otherwise have paid us a visit. Several species of wading birds are common on the mud flats and, of late years, considerable flocks of kill-deer plover have gathered, for a time. This species was almost unknown to Wenham, when I was a boy. And sometimes in late autumn clouds of snow buntings or shore larks flash, here and there.

“The great blue heron seems to be commoner, and certainly tamer than forty years ago, and, in the old days, we never saw white herons of any kind, egrets or the young of little blues. Web-footed fowl, the geese and ducks, give us more of a thrill, than most other groups. They bring with them the mystery of the north; they usher in our glorious autumn weather, misty mornings and frosty nor'westers. And that is not all, for their sharp silhouettes and the "whiffle" of their wings appeal alike to the poet, painter, hunter and the humble watcher of the wild.



Ice houses on Northwest corner of Wenham Lake.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum.

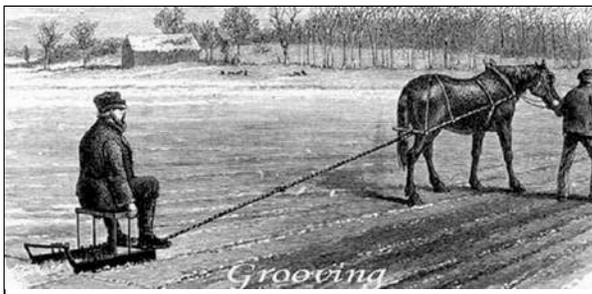
“Three species of geese and twenty-five species of ducks have been gathered from Wenham waters, not to mention various loons, grebes, gulls and little auks. ... Scarcely a fall passed, thirty years ago, without ruddies, red heads, ring necks and even the lordly canvas-back, leaving a few of their numbers behind; but our main reliance, were black ducks.¹¹

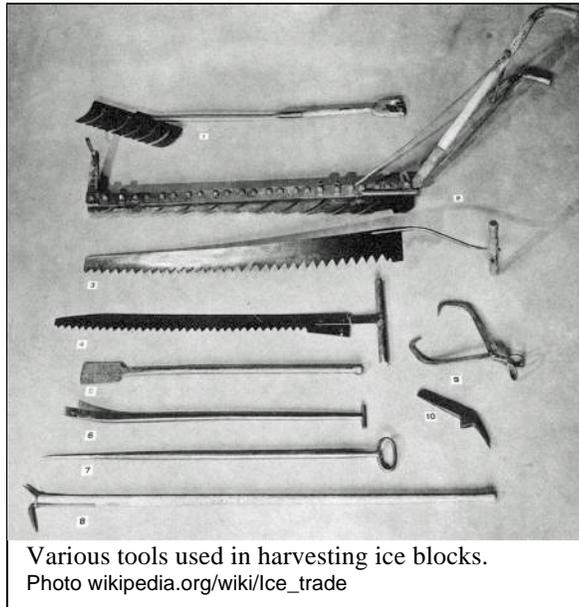
Some people might say the Great Pond has been “shot out,” referring to all the hunting (*fowling*), of the past. But, it might also be that the purity of the lake, that once attracted a wide range of fowl, is gone.

Ice business

Wenham Lake’s claim to fame, for nearly 100 years, was its ice, its crystal clear ice. The ice a British queen is said to have praised. The ice that no other pond could provide, though some did take its name.

In the 1800s, there were nine main sources of ice around Boston, including: the Kennebec and Penobscot Rivers, in Maine; as well as, Fresh Pond, Cambridge; Smith's Pond, Arlington; Spy Pond, Arlington; Sandy





Pond, Ayer; Horn Pond, Woburn; Lake Quannapowitt, Wakefield; Haggett's Pond, Andover; Suntaug Lake, Lynnfield; and Wenham Lake. However, ice from Wenham Lake had unmatched purity and clarity.⁴

In 1842-3, Charles Lander, of Salem, began building ice-houses on the northeast shore of Wenham Lake. One of them formerly was Wenham's Meeting House, built in 1748. Lander's ice-houses were located on the small

cove, at the north-east edge of the Lake.⁴

Ice Harvesting

For the land to build the ice houses, Lander wanted the area where the knoll, on which Reverend Peter had preached. He asked the town to sell it, as well as a strip of adjacent land -- so that a railroad track spur could be built, to connect the ice-houses, to the main railway line.

In November 1843, the town voted to sell the strip of land to Lander. At the next Town Meeting, in March 1844, the question came up as to whether or not Lander was to be permitted to buy Peter's Hill. The vote was 22 for the sale and 42 against it. The next month, April, another meeting was held, and the question of the sale of Peter's Hill was reconsidered. This time, 35 voted in favor of the sale, and only 22 opposed it. Lander bought Peter's Hill for \$75, and the strip of the land, between the east base of the hill for \$25.¹²

Edmund Kimball, of Wenham, pleaded, with tears, at a town meeting, for his fellow citizens, "to spurn the paltry sum, offered, and hold inviolate this historic spot." The ice company leveled the hill. In 1889-90, Wenham adopted, as its corporate seal, a drawing that includes "Peter's Pulpit."²

One of the builders of the rail spur was Grenville Mullen Dodge: he later became famous as a general, in the Union Army, and was a central figure in building the transcontinental railroad, in 1869. Today, portions of the spur's roadbed are barely visible behind the 5th hole, at Lakeview Golf Course.

Lander's ice-houses, like sentinels in a row, stood at the water's edge. They had covered inclined stagings (*slides*), upon which ice was conveyed into the insulated buildings. Each wooden structure was 127 ft. long, 20 ft. wide, and 24-ft. high. The building closest to County Road had a cupola, in which there was a bell, for signaling the workmen.

Lander began storing ice, in early 1844, for shipment, to England, later that year.⁴

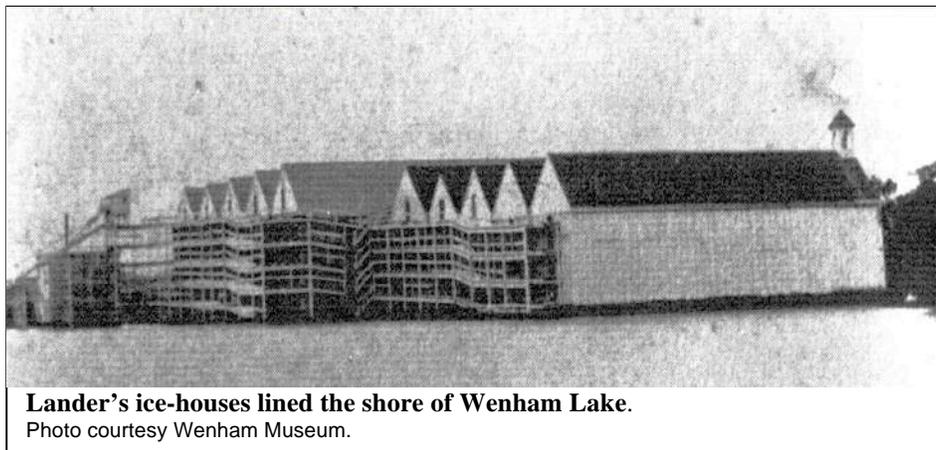
Harvesting the ice began, when the frozen lake could support a man's weight. First, workmen cut small holes, over the entire area, at a distance of several ft.: the pure lake water rose through the holes, and spread over the punctured surface, where it froze. This was called "sinking the pond." After a week or more of very low temperatures, the ice would form into an average thickness of 15 inches.

Next, the area was cleared of all sludge. The surface was, then, "grooved" into blocks, by a knifelike plow, drawn by a horse. This step lined the ice, with shallow furrows, indicating at which points the cakes were to be cut.

The workmen separated the blocks, with hand saws and, then, they loosened them, with a needle-like crowbar. The blocks were poled to the ice-house elevator, to be hauled up for storage. In the beginning, horses were used, but in 1866, steam power was used.

An acre of foot-thick ice yielded about 1,000 tons of rough ice. A block of ice generally was 44 inches square.

John I. Durgin was manager of the plant for thirty years and had charge of the workmen, sometimes numbering three hundred. For the housing of workers from a distance, a large boarding house was built, on County Road, about where Pond Way is, today.²



Lander quickly found that his fledgling ice business required more capital, than the \$10,000, that he had raised. More was required, to keep the endeavor from failing. In March 1844, Lander sold an interest in his company to George Wheatland and Joshua H. Ward, of Salem. With the added finances, the company stayed alive. Soon after, Wheatland supervised the first shipment of ice in rail-cars going to the sea port in Boston. ²

The first shipment of ice to England, aboard the bark Ellen, left for Liverpool, on June 10, 1844. The initial venture, as well as a few more, were financial failures. ²

Lander's dream, the Wenham Lake Ice Company, was taken over by George Wheatland (1844). (*Lander, years later, became an officer in the Civil War, where he died, at Bloomington Gap, Virginia.*) Soon after (1845), he sold the business to Nathaniel West, who subsequently (1846) transferred it to Francis and George Peabody and Augustus Perry, of Salem, and John L. Gardner, of Boston. ²

About 1850, Gage, Hittinger and Company bought the Wenham Lake Ice Company. They, however, only shipped their cargoes to southern ports. They sent none to England or other European ports. ²

In 1851, the name of the firm became Gage, Sawyer and Company, its members being Addison Gage, who was still the head, Timothy Sawyer, Dr. Henry Lyon, and Thomas G. Frothingham. ²



For the housing of workers from a distance, a large boarding house was built, on County Road. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum.

In 1859, the name again changed, becoming Addison Gage and Co., Gage's son, Charles, being his only partner. The father died in 1868. ²

In 1871, the firm gained new partners: R. W. Hopkins and Arthur Harrington -- the former was Addison Gage's son-in-law. The company gathered ice from Fresh Pond, Cambridge, Spy Pond, Arlington, and Sandy Pond, Ayer, as well as from Wenham Lake. The business successfully continued, at Wenham Lake, into the 20th century. From 1860 to 80, the company harvested, from Wenham Lake, 30,000 tons, annually, on the average. The Gage company sent ice to Cuba, the West Indies, India, and Europe, as well as England. ²

The name "Wenham Lake Ice," a symbol of purity, was not copyrighted. Being so popular, other companies used the name: some Norwegians, seeking to sell more of their ice in England, renamed a lake, in their country, "Wenham Lake" ¹³

A short-lived spinoff of the huge success of Wenham ice was an "appliance" manufacturing business. For storage of the ice, in homes and restaurants, it was highly advised to use a "Wenham ice box." These were air-tight, wood boxes, sealed by a double-lid arrangement, and containing small shelves for food storage. ⁴

Another spinoff was the export of apples. In 1855, there were 3,500 apple trees in Wenham, most of which were Baldwins. The Baldwin apples often were shipped, in barrels among the blocks of ice. In India, the Baldwins found such a large market among the English population, that they sold for 50 to 75¢ apiece. ⁴

The first person to establish the ice trade, in America, was the well-known Frederic Tudor, of Boston. In 1805, Tudor shipped ice to Martinique. His business lasted until 1867 (*he died in 1864*). It does not appear, however, that Tudor ever took ice from Wenham Lake. ⁴

One of the last firms to harvest Wenham ice was the Beverly Ice Company, founded by John C. Kelleher, Sr. In 1912, the company began cutting ice blocks from the lake. When the Salem-Beverly Water Supply Board restricted Wenham Lake to providing water supply for Beverly and Salem, Kelleher moved the ice cutting operation to his own property, in Beverly, where a 5-acre pond was dug.

Ice harvesting at Wenham Lake met its first crisis, on Nov. 13, 1873. A fire began in the hay, in which the ice was packed: all the buildings burned to the ground. Other ice companies met the same fate. The S. M. Hill buildings, on the northwest shore of the lake, burned in 1935. ²

According to a former agreement, with the State Water Board, no existing houses were ever to be replaced, at least not directly along the banks of the lake, should they be destroyed. ²

In 1937, fire claimed the ice houses of the Metropolitan-Wenham Lake Ice Co. The last ice house, that of the Boston Ice Company, which was behind what today is MacDonald's, on Rte 1A, was demolished in 1943.

Summer resort

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, efforts were made to turn Wenham Lake into a summer resort. Street car and rail service had recently begun. Several large summer homes -- the Tiltons, the Waters, and two lovely homes of the Phillips family -- were built on its shores. Lakeside, the large farmhouse, owned by Joseph Lafayette Batchelder, became a summer boarding house. Located on Main Street, "Lakeside House" had its own icehouse and barn. An ad in The Beverly Times read: "To be let for the season -- a comfortably furnished twelve-room house, handy to steam cars, at North Beverly and Wenham; horse cars pass in front of house, farm supplies, milk, fruits and fresh vegetables; ice house, brn, etc., and good fishing and boating on lake." ⁵

Another ad: "Skating, fishing or sleighing parties supplied, with early or late suppers on short notice on application to Mrs. M. A. Batchelder, Lakeside House, Wenham." ⁵



The large farmhouse, owned by Joseph Lafayette Batchelder, became a summer boarding house. Located on Main Street, "Lakeside House" had its own icehouse and barn. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum.

Around 1890, Joseph Kilham purchased land, on the lake shore, at the end of Lake Avenue, then called Enon Avenue. He laid out an ambitious plan to include 64 lots, and put them up for sale, calling the development Massasoit Park. Several lots were sold, but apparently only one cottage was built, by Ulysses G. Haskell, a well-known Beverly lawyer.



Ten-room hotel, Massasoit House, at edge of Wenham Lake, burned, in 1924.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum

He then erected a hotel of ten rooms, calling it the Massasoit House, and took in boarders. The hotel burned, in 1924.⁵

Massasoit Park became quite an attraction for weekend visits by people from Salem and Beverly. They would come to the Great Pond via the streetcar system, which ran from Beverly Bridge.

On September 2, 1892, a boat party to end all boat parties was held on Wenham Lake. Here is how a newspaper article described it:⁵

"The illumination of Wenham Lake, last night, and the villages of North Beverly and upper Wenham was a scene that has never been surpassed, in that section. Some forty boats, mostly dories, were beautifully illuminated with Chinese lanterns. There were many-colored lights on the boats, and they were rigged in all shapes and forms.

"The Salem Brass Band was located in the middle of the lake and discoursed music. All along the shores of the lake and on the streets of North Beverly and Wenham were some of the finest illuminations ever seen in either town. "On the westerly shore was the Phillips House, brilliantly lighted. All along Enon and Dodge Streets, Danforth's tower on the hill, Lakeside farm, Batchelder's cottage, the Massasoit House,

Haskell's cottage and fifty others were a fine sight. The two pumping stations, the depot and many other places were brilliant with lights. "On the westerly side of the lake, fireworks were displayed, and on the easterly shore was plenty of colored fire. The scene was a most charming one to the crowds of people, who looked down upon it from the high bluffs of the shore.

"The procession of lighted boats formed in the Phillips cove and, crossing to the easterly side, passed up to the Massasoit House and down the other side to the middle of the lake, where a circle was formed around the band boat, and the procession dismissed, as they scattered to their respective moorings. Owing to the strong breeze, the music of the band could not be heard, at the Wenham end of the lake, nor very well at the other end, but it was through no fault of the band." "Crowds came from Salem, Beverly, Wenham and Hamilton. The street railway company transported 3,000 passengers."

Obviously, boating was very popular on Wenham Lake. Some sail boats were used, but the mainstays were dories and skiffs, for fishing. A few of the more sophisticated were had fish wells built into them, where they could keep their bait and their catches in good condition. During winter, there were some iceboats.

Boating continued until 1920, when it was prohibited.⁵

Pond John

No discussion of Wenham Lake would be complete without some mention of "Pond John," or as he also was called, "Master John" Dodge. But, either from the location of his home, or from his affection for it, he was quite as well known as "Pond John."⁵

He was something of a hermit and a philosopher. Having been in early life a schoolteacher. A man of contemplation rather than of action, he lived alone and died without descendants.

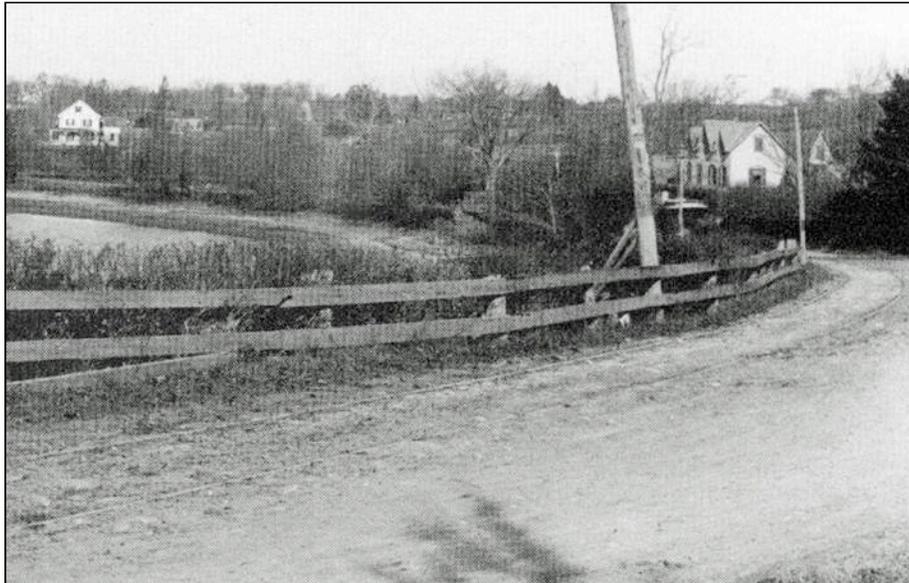
Robert Rantoul said that "Pond John" Dodge was, in his later years, short, thickset and somewhat stooping. He was, by no means, illiterate and at times had taught school. He had no money and would have fared

badly, if his neighbors had not furnished him with many meals, in return for the conversational entertainment he always provided.

At the front of his house, which he inherited from his father, and which was alongside the Great Pond, there was a swing hung from the lofty branch of giant elm tree. He enjoyed giving the passer-by a refreshing swing. The ropes



Pond John Dodge house on shore of Wenham Lake. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



Pond John Dodge's home was near the northeast end of the lake.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum

were of very great length, so Mr. Rantoul told us, and a person could literally be swung out over the lake.

He also enjoyed peddling about the pond, in his "pleasure-barge," which had a crank that he used to power the craft. Often, he took children for rides, telling them old world stories. Perhaps this tradition evolved from his own childhood. Pond John is said to have sat on the knee of General Thomas Gage, when the royal governor of the province, when he would cruise about the pond, in a pleasure-barge.

John Phillips said that "Pond John" was a great storyteller. He had a remarkable fund of stories and anecdotes and was unusually well informed. His memory was retentive, and with him perished a store of unwritten legends of this pond and stories about people and places in Wenham.²

He would walk along County Road, returning from Beverly, and on his way home, he might stop for supper, at a neighbor's home. Others would drop in, they would gather about the fire and "Pond John" would amuse them, on many a long evening. He was always made welcome, wherever he went and he visited many houses.

There may have been one person, who did not look kindly upon Pond John's lifestyle. On the edge of the old section of Wenham cemetery, there is a tomb that has a door looking toward the lake. Here was buried John's brother, Uzziel, a reputed man of action, who, reportedly, wanted

the door of his tomb placed that he might watch over his brother's laggard life. In return for this, "Pond John" wrote this epitaph:

*Here lies the body of Uzziel Dodge,
In life he dodged all good and little evil,
But in death he could not dodge the devil.*

The Town authorities took exception to this inscription and had it removed.⁵

Wenham poet, Allen Peabody, helped preserve the memory of Pond John, with these verses:

*Now Wenham Lake--then Wenham Pond;
Against its shores lived "Master John,"
Well known by everyone in town;
Who wore his trousers in his boots,
Whose brains could figure squares and roots,
Who loved to fish and keep a boat,
But never knew the worth of soap;
Who sometimes kept the village school,
Taught ABC to dunce and fool,
Who sent to Boston a petition
To make a law against folks fishing
Alewives out of Wenham water,
For he thought that no one ought to
Drag a seine, or fish with line, or
Catch a pickerel, perch or shiner --
Only just himself.
Years have passed since "Master John"
Grew old and died and journeyed home.*

John Dodge was born and died, in the old house of his birth, by the pond. He died some time before 1860. The house was removed, in the seventies, and the old elm was cut down, in 1882.

Reservoir

The greatest changes in the Great Pond came, with its becoming a reservoir.

It all started in October 1863, when a group of Salem citizens petitioned the City Council "to take the necessary measures to procure from the legislature power to establish city water works, for the purpose of furnishing an abundant supply of water, for all domestic and manufacturing purpose."²

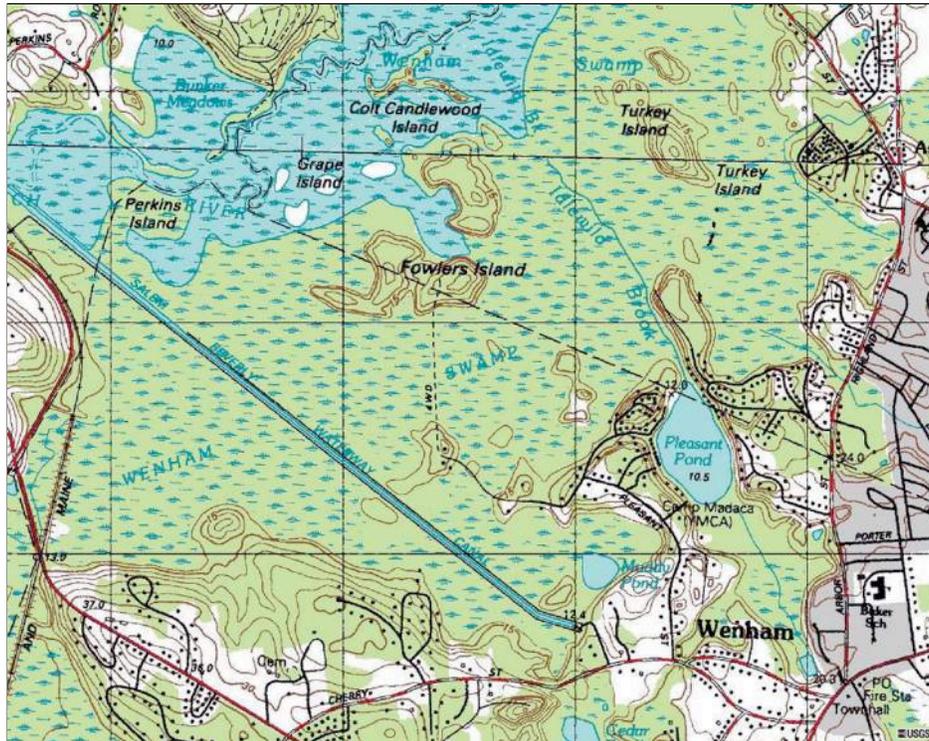


The Salem-Beverly water plant, in 2006, withdrew 361 million gallons of water were drawn from Wenham Lake. Photo Bing Maps

A committee examined the sources of supply, within the control of the Salem, and Danvers Aqueduct Company, which included: Brown's Pond, Spring Pond and Humphrey's Pond. The committee quickly realized that from all these sources there was not enough water. On February 11, 1864, the committee suggested a supplementary petition to the Legislature, asking that Wenham Pond be added to the pool, from which water could be drawn. The committee's report stated "that an ample supply can be obtained from Wenham Pond, which, if introduced, would afford facilities for increased business, promote the comfort of the people and the safety and value of property."²

The State Legislature agreed. The law provided that Wenham, Hamilton, Danvers, and Peabody could use the water also, but no action has ever been taken by these communities. (*When Wenham was founded, the citizens depended greatly upon the lake. In later years, much of Wenham's water supply came from driven wells. Since, November 1947, Wenham has had a public water system, which draws water from two town-owned wells.*)²

Water was first fed to the Salem main pipe, on Rantoul Street, on Christmas morning, of 1868. The first year, 1869, an average of 500,000 gallons of water were pumped from Wenham Lake, daily.²



Canal from the Ipswich River, through Wenham Swamp, to the lake. Water is piped to the northern end of the lake, at Cedar Street.
 Map U. S. Geographical Survey

In 1872, a low earthen dam was built, at the outlet to the Alewife Brook, to raise the lake level two feet.. This provided 200 million gallons more of water. It also increased the surface area of the lake. ²

Originally, Wenham Lake water, being spring fed, was crystal clear. However, as water consumption went up, it was necessary to increase the supply.

In 1874, it became apparent that still more water would be needed in the coming years, as much as 1,250,000,000 gallons, in 1876. Various means and sources were considered for amassing more water, but none seemed to be insufficient. The Ipswich River was suggested, and the Water Board first recommended that an application be made to the Legislature for leave to take water from Ipswich River. No action was taken, at that time, by the State. ²

Around 1880, a canal – more accurately, a ditch – was dug to drain Cedar Pond and the surrounding area (*about 20 acres, in all*) into the lake.

In 1885, Beverly first began to draw water from the Great Pond. This was done by tapping into the Rantoul Street pipeline.

In the 1890s, the water board acquired land, by eminent domain, in East Wenham, in order to dam the Miles River, thus forming a lake, now known as Longham. When this was done, it was necessary to demolish or move several homes in the area. Water was piped underground from Longham, under the railroad tracks and underneath Route 1A, to Wenham Cove, at the southern end of Wenham Lake.⁵

In December 1895, the pipe from the Longham Meadow to Wenham Lake was opened. It remained open until the end of May 1896. During that period the level of the water, in Wenham Lake, rose nearly 11 ft.²

The 20th century saw the need for more water steadily increase. The Salem-Beverly Water Supply Board, which became the custodian of the Wenham Lake Reservoir, in 1913, dug, in 1917, a canal from the Ipswich River, through Wenham Swamp, to the lake. Water is piped to the northern end of the lake, at Cedar Street.²

Because water quality deteriorated, with the addition of this supply, it was necessary, in 1935, to build a water purification system, in North Beverly. The Salem Beverly Waterway Canal was dredged and widened, in 1974, and roads built on each side.²

Demand for water continued, and, as the Ipswich River could only be tapped in wet seasons, Putnamville Reservoir was built, in Danvers, on land then known as the Homestead Golf Course. Completed, in 1955, water is pumped to it from the Ipswich River, via the canal and pumping station. Here, the water is stored. When needed, the water flows into the lake through part of the old system and the pipe under Cedar Street.²

How much water now is pumped from Wenham Lake?

In 2006, the Salem-Beverly Water Supply Board withdrew 361 million gallons of water from Wenham Lake. That is about a million gallons a day, which is twice as much as was drawn the first year, back in 1868.¹⁴

John Phillips

Much of the history of the Wenham Lake has been preserved by Dr. John C. Phillips, in his book, *The Great Pond*, published in 1928. Dr. Phillips and his family were very much involved in preserving the natural beauty of Wenham Lake and its shores.

John C. was the son of John C. Phillips, Sr., who built a imposing home, known as "Windyknob," in 1882, on the northwest edge of Wenham Lake. Today, the site is a conference center of 176 acres, known as Moraine Farms and owned by The Trustees of Reservations, since 1991.



Dr. John C. Phillips
Photo "The Great Pond"

John's brother, William Phillips, who gave the memorial address at the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Town of Wenham, built a home on Prospect Hill, overlooking the lake, at the narrows. Unfortunately, both buildings were destroyed by fire. John's home was rebuilt.

In 1902, John and William jointly acquired a large tract of land on the eastern shore of the lake. This land, part of which had formerly been owned by the Gage, Hittinger Ice Co., stretched from just behind Hugh Peter's monument up to the property of Mrs. Lincoln Boyden, on Cedar Street. They planted, on what was then barren land, many



John C. Phillips, Sr. home, known as "Windyknob," overlooking Wenham Lake (circa 1937). Photo Fairchild Aerial Surveys

pine trees. In 1934, to insure that the area remain undeveloped, it was deeded to the Salem/Beverly Water Supply Board. In 1938, a hurricane destroyed much of the beautiful grove.⁵

Dr. John C. Phillips was born in Boston, in 1876. He graduated from Harvard College, and Harvard Medical School. During World War I, he was commanding officer of the 33rd Field Hospital.

Although he never practiced medicine, he was a noted author, naturalist, and outdoor man. Living by the lake contributed to his interest in wild-life, and he published many books on the subject. His greatest, *Natural History of the Ducks*, published in four volumes, 1922-1926.

In 1938, Dr. Phillips died suddenly, while on one of his many world trips. On the northern shore of Wenham Lake, the Conservation Commission erected a stone memorial, in his memory.

Fly ash

The pristine purity, of the waters of Wenham Lake, has been assaulted many times over the past four centuries, but never more so, than during the last half of the 20th century.

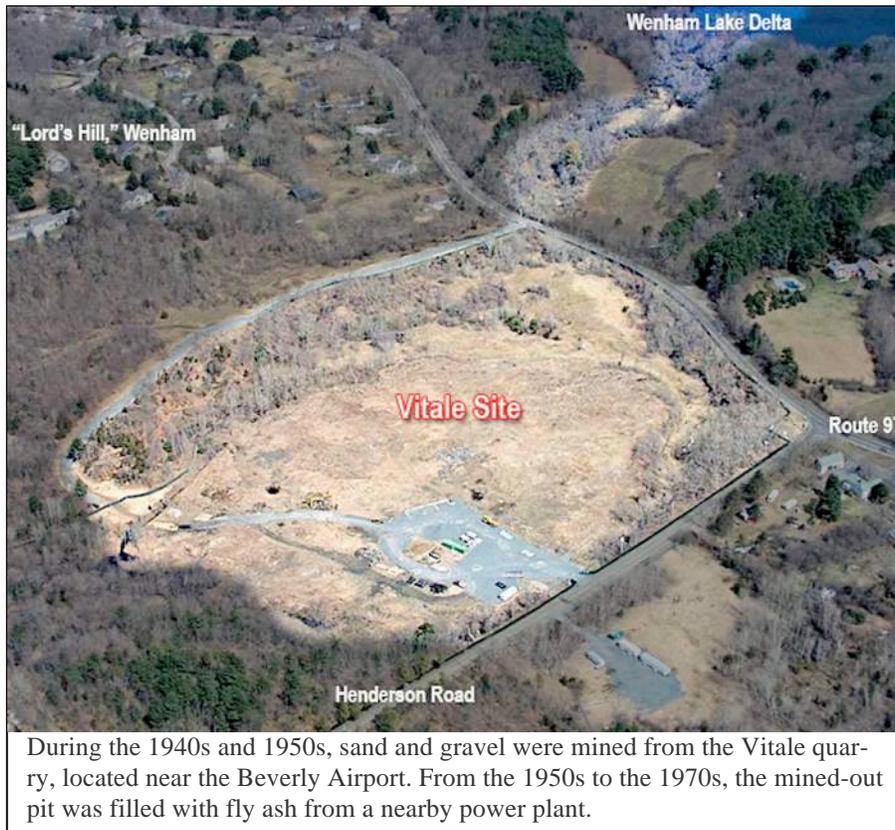
In January 2001, a study was done to analyze the quality of the water in Wenham Lake. The study revealed that there were large deposits of contaminated fly ash in the lake. Fly ash is the waste material that remains, after coal is burned to produce electricity. Coal ash can contain a variety of heavy metals and toxins, including arsenic and mercury.¹⁵

During the 1940s and 1950s, about 300,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel were mined from the Vitale quarry, located near the Beverly Airport. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the mined-out pit was filled, by the former property owner, with fly ash from a nearby power plant.¹⁵

Over the years, Airport Brook, which ran through the site, eroded about 40,000 cubic yards of fly ash from the landfill. The fly ash traveled downstream and deposited within the stream banks and adjacent wetlands, as well as a portion of Wenham Lake, located a half-mile downstream of the Vitale site.¹⁵

Although the Vitale site was abandoned, by the former owners, it is now owned by the City of Beverly, New England Power Co. (*NEP, a National Grid company*). NEP was the owner of the power plant, at the time the fly ash was generated and placed, at the Vitale site.

NEP agreed to clean up the site and the areas affected. The project included the removing of fly ash from the banks of Airport Brook, the adjacent wetlands, and the exposed reservoir bottom during seasonal low lake levels.⁶



Restoring 16 acres of wetlands, where fly ash was removed, included installation of extensive plantings and wildlife habitat features.⁶

In, the cleanup project was completed.

County Road

In 1970, the State began a long-overdue project to repave the entire length of 1A, in Wenham. Part of the project was to straighten the curve by Pond Hill, next to Wenham Lake. This was to be done by building an overpass at the north end of the lake.⁸

Straightening the road had been requested by some Wenham residents, who felt the road, along this stretch, was not safe. Many other residents, including those who formed a “Preserve Our Town Committee” loudly objected.

In the end, the lakeside road was widened by 5 ft., but it was not straightened. The rest of the road, through Wenham, was not widened, only paved.

Earlier that year, Wenham established a Historic District, which ran from the Hamilton-Wenham town line to the Wenham Cemetery. Following the controversy over the straightening of Rte. 1A, by Wenham Lake, the Historic District was extended to the Wenham-Beverly town line.⁷

Mother Nature's Fury

Over the many years, some great storms have passed over the Great Pond.

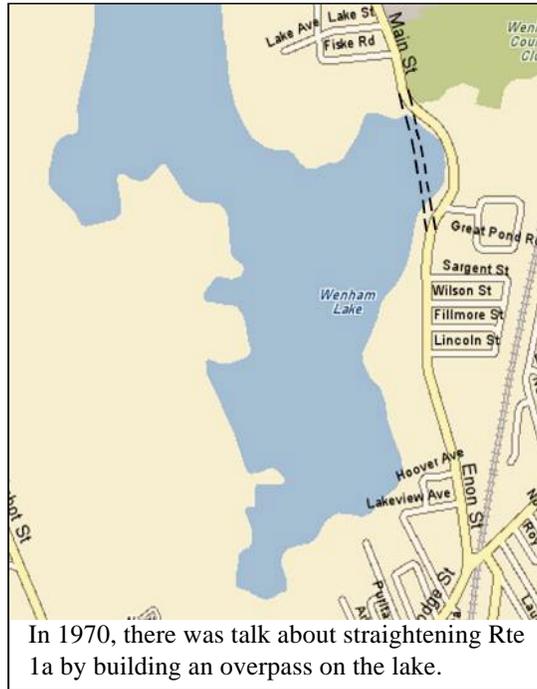
D. H. Johnson, the superintendent of the Salem Water Works, described a tornado that crossed over the lake, on June 3, 1871:²

"The clouds kept shutting in closer, it was growing darker and darker, the wind blowing a gale, when across the lake comes a water-spout, in the shape of a tin funnel, such as is used in filling bottles, the broad mouth being thousands of ft. in diameter, away up in the clouds, the small end but fifty to one hundred ft. diameter, touching the water.

"The water-spout in its passage across the lake was taking up water All the while; the wind increased in violence, bringing a wave nearly three ft. high along with it, which washed well up on to the road"

On Mother's Day 2006, a major rainstorm hit the Wenham area. As much as ten inches of rain fell, over the weekend. Wenham Lake overflowed its banks, because the culvert, at the Alewife Brook outlet, quickly became clogged with debris. The entire lowland area, at the northeast end of the lake, flooded.

One resident said, "Wenham Lake is now in my backyard." Water filled the basements of many homes, at the end of Lake Avenue. For many days, the fire department assisted in the pumping out of basements.





As viewed from Cedar Street, Wenham Lake is one of the most beautiful and tranquil sights, one can see, in all New England. Photo J. Hauck, 2011

Today

Today (2007), a large area around Wenham Lake is owned by the Salem Beverly Water Board (48 acres). Other areas are owned by: the Town of Beverly (29.6 acres), the Hamilton-Wenham Open Land Trust (11.1 acres), several private lots (about 50 acres) and National Grid (13.5 acres). Possibly, the Town of Wenham may purchase the National Grid land.

Being a reservoir, there are restrictions on what can be built around the Great Pond. Thankfully, we will not witness what has been done in the past.

In 1937, Dr. Phillips wrote, ²“When I was a boy, the most conspicuous object in Wenham Cove, as we looked across from the family house, at Moraine Farm, was the long, dirty, red shed sloping down into the water, built to house the machinery for the lifting of ice, after the great ice house fire of 1873. That was all that remained of the great Gage Hittinger Ice Plant, in the eighties, but even that went up finally in smoke... But you can still see the long rows of piles, which once supported this elevator, sticking out of the mud, when the lake is drawn off, in autumn.

“The smaller ice plant of the S. M. Hill Company, at the north end of the lake, grew more and more decrepit in recent years, was propped up and patched up, until finally this whole tottering group burned to the ground, in 1935, leaving a very ugly scar, between the lake and Cedar Street.”

Now, when driving along Cedar Street, Wenham Lake is one of the most beautiful and tranquil sights, one can see, in all New England. The lake banks furnish extraordinary scenes and views of nature's beauty. There are but a few tasteful residences, upon its borders. Most other locations remain unoccupied or marred by the hand of man.

At this quiet end of the Great Pond – there are no traffic sounds, as by 1A – you can hear the water ripple, birds chirping and the gentle breezes rustling through the trees.

There are evenings, when the air is still, and when the water becomes like a smooth sheet of glass. The moon's reflection can be like a light shining up from the depths. Try as you may, with a camera, the beauty cannot be captured on film.

There are mornings, during late fall, when the spirits seem to rise up from the lake. The warmed waters of summer exhale a low-lying mist, which floats over the surface. One might almost hear the grand lady sighing, as she prepares to don her frozen coat.

There are late afternoons, during the summer, when fish frolic, at water's surface. They break the surface, and had they voices, we might hear them laughing at us, for we cannot catch them.

Yes, Wenham Lake is not what she was a long time ago. But, she remains a beautiful grand dame.

Updated 06-01-14

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Addendum

Robbing wood – It began at the annual town meeting, held on a blustery March afternoon, March 1, the year 18 hundred and 42. The Wenham Selectmen believed that the town owned the land around the Great Pond. They voted to sell the wood standing thereon, in lots to be removed, at once. The next day, those who had purchased lots proceeded to cut their wood and remove same.

But, there was a problem. The Dodges believed this was their land, hence their wood. They became very upset, when they saw their precious trees being felled.

The first day's tree cutting was interrupted by inclement weather. In mid afternoon, the hewers suspended their labors, until the next day.

The Dodges did not opt for muskets, but rather hatchets to settle the matter. They quickly put out word to their friends to come and take wood – for free. After nightfall, and under cover of the storm, with cattle and sledges, with lanterns and axes, they began to fell the trees and take away the wood. They were resolved, to a man, that no stick of Balch pasture fuel should ever warm the house of a purchaser from the town of Wenham.

The work of hauling it away went briskly. The moon broke through the storm, and the heavy clouds rolled away. From midnight till dawn, in the clear moonlight of that gusty March morning, load after load of cut wood disappeared.

The next day, when the claimants returned, they found, to their utter amazement and discomfort, that the wood was gone. The contested portion of Balch pasture, which the day before was a well-covered wood-lot, was now without a branch or even twig. Their neighbors, after their hard night's labor, were quietly breakfasting, by the roadside.

The courts afterwards decided against the validity of the town's title. The town's claim rested upon an Indian deed, from the heirs of the Sagamore of Agawam, releasing, for four pounds, sixteen shillings, all claim to the soil of the town of Wenham. It was dated A.D. 1700. The Dodges claim rested upon possession of the land: and we all now, that possession is nine tenths of the law.