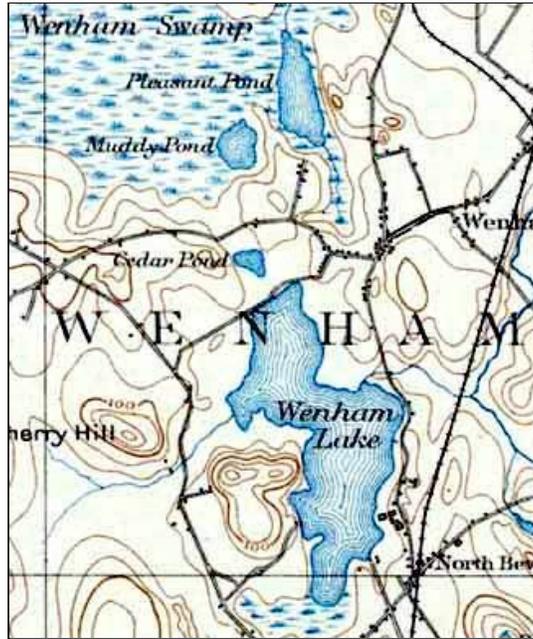


A History of **Pleasant Pond** *From 1637 to 2013*

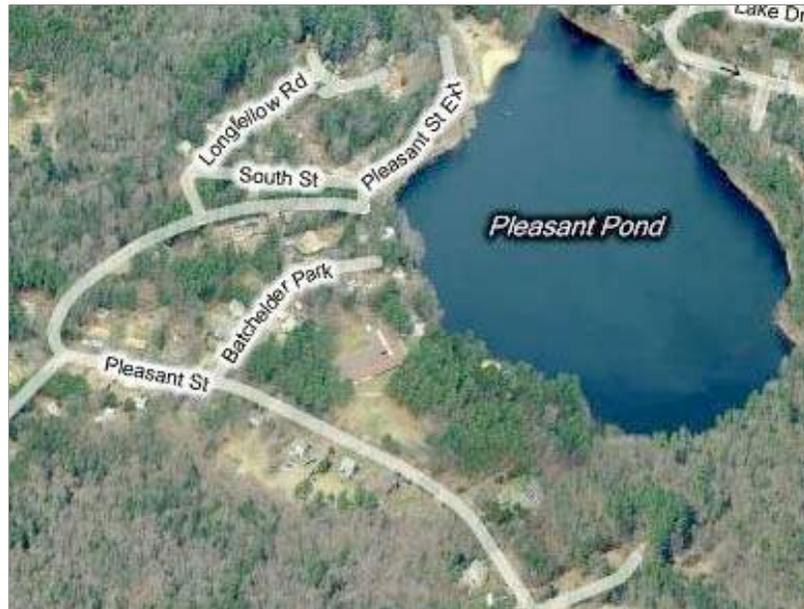


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Jack E. Hauck



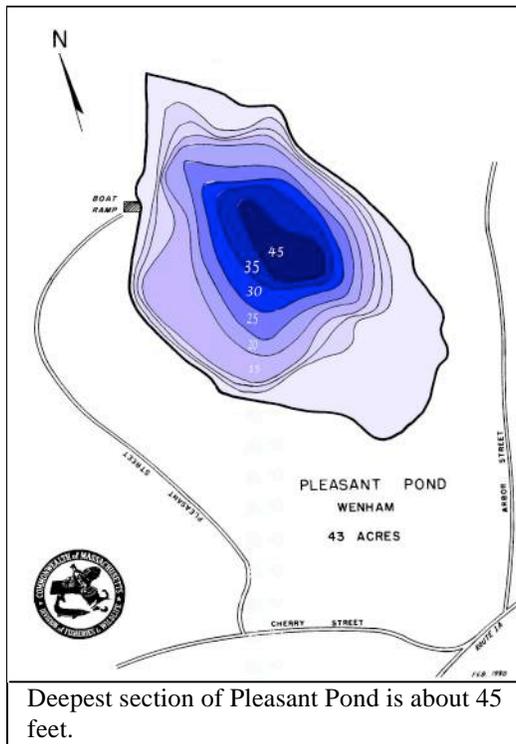
PLEASANT POND

Pleasant Pond, which is about 43 acres in size, is one of five ponds in Wenham. It was formed by a glacier carving a pocket, in the area's sienite-rock shelf. (*Sienite is a coarse-grain igneous rock of the same general composition as granite, but with only a small amount of quartz*)

During the 1700s, there apparently were two Pleasant Ponds, in Wenham. Over in the Neck, the Pond, that we now call Coy's Pond, also was called Pleasant Pond, on many early Beverly and Manchester deeds.¹

Although Pleasant Pond was the original name, it was, for a brief period of years, called Idlewood Lake. In the early 1900s, Reverend Will C. Wood, pastor of the Wenham Congregational Church, often went to the pond, to write his Sunday sermons. He fondly called the place "Idlewood Lake," in appreciation of its inviting quiet and beauty.² (*Not aware of when the name went back to Pleasant Pond.*) But, there may be more to the story: I'll get to another possible reason, later.

Pleasant Pond primarily is located in Wenham. But, at the north end, there are about two acres of the pond in Hamilton. However, neither town owns the pond: it is controlled by the State.



How deep is Pleasant Pond?

The answer depends on who you believe.

A 1980 Division of Fisheries & Wildlife survey, of the pond, shows the same spot is only about 44 feet. Average depth is 20 feet. At 6 to 8 feet, the water is clear, for the most part.

In 1938, Dr. John Phillips wrote that its bottom was 45 feet deep.⁴

A 1960s Salem Evening news article, about fishing, had a map that showed the pond's deepest part, the east-center side, was 65 feet.³⁰

No one has ever found any of the underwater caverns,

once rumored to exist, at the bottom of the pond.

In the mid 1960s, Pleasant Pond became steadily shallower. During the summer of '65, the pond level was dropping over an inch a day. Some people thought the problem might be due to Wenham's new, nearby well, which was said to be pumping 1.5 million gallons of water, every day. This was countered by those, who said that the well was fed by underground streams, and was not drawing from the brook that feeds the pond.³⁸ The next year, the pond level remained constant, and soon recovered.

Underground springs are the main source of water for Pleasant Pond. The points of their entry are evident by very clear water, at the surface. One spring source is at the south end of the pond.³⁰ (*Might these be the same streams that feed into Wenham's nearby well?*)

At the pond's southern inlet, there is a brook that, now, is mostly overgrown. Called "Lovers Lane," by some, in the 1950s to 60s, it once was quite free flowing, and was navigable for over a hundred yards.³⁰ In a map drawn, in 1976, by Rupert B. Lillie, "*Pictorial Map of Wenham and Environs, 1776*" the brook – with no name -- is shown to run from Pleasant Pond all the way to the area of the Wenham Town Hall, where there once was a small pond.⁷ (*Rupert Lillie lived most of his life, near Pleasant Pond.*)

Alongside the brook there was a path that meandered its way, from just behind what is now the Wenham Tea House, all the way to Pleasant Pond. Some portions of the path are still there.³⁰

It next became known as Pleasant Pond Brook.³⁶ Some locals, in the 1950s to 70s, referred to the stream, in the area just above the pond, as Sunny Brook.³⁰

Just above the outlet from Pleasant Pond, there is a narrow area of raised ground, which stretches, almost like an arm, alongside Idlewild Brook. Hamilton has two wells on this property.

Trees and shrubs densely enclose much of the shoreline. The trees mainly are pine, although there also are various deciduous trees. There are few flowering shrubs around the pond, and these are not natural to the area (*Seems strange that there is no Mountain Laurel*).

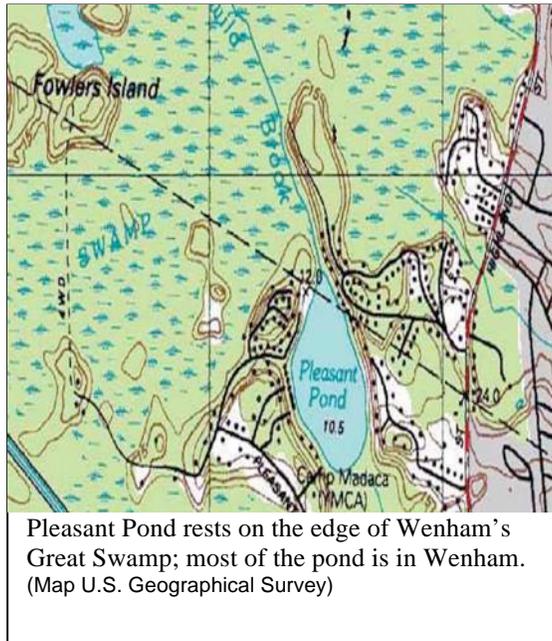
The highest area around the pond is the moraine along the east side. It begins just below what once was called Lovering's Neck. (*In the early 1700s, John Lovering may have owned land adjoining Pleasant Pond.*) In the mid 1900s, the moraine was known as Idlewood Ridge. (*That's Idlewood, not Idlewild. Perhaps, it was the idyllic ridge area, where Reverend Wood went to write his sermons.*) Now, called Juniper Ridge, it extends northwards, for about a half mile. Pond depth drops off more steeply, below the ridge, than at any other area.⁵

Prior to the mid 1960s, the ridge was about 15 to 20 feet higher, than it is now. The top of the ridge was scraped away to gather stone for filling low areas behind the ridge and to create a large level area, for building homes.³⁰

Most of the bottom of Pleasant Pond is mud. Along the shore, there is some gravel and stone debris. ⁽⁴⁾ Sand was brought in to create the pond's two beaches.³⁰



Wenham beach. (Photo, J. Hauck, 2008)



Aquatic weeds are very abundant around much of the shoreline, particularly at the shallow north and south ends. Most of the bottom of Pleasant Pond also is very weedy.

In the past, weeds periodically were mechanically removed. However, State regulations now permit only manual removal of the weeds. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (MDCR) claims that the excessive removal of invasive weed can increase algal blooms: weeds uptake nutrients that

cause the blooms.⁶

It is likely that the increased weed growth is due to run-off water, containing fertilizers, from surrounding residential properties, providing nutrients, for the weeds.³⁰

A hidden jewel

Pleasant Pond is tucked away at the southern edge of Wenham's Great Swamp. There are no major roads leading to it ... it's off the beaten path. But, when finally found, what a great heirloom it is. (*Although, now needing a little polishing, i.e., TLC.*)

In 1799, Reverend William Bentley, pastor at the Peabody's Second Congregational Church, fondly wrote about a walk he and a few friends had about Pleasant Pond: *"There is a beautiful prospect from the ridge, eastward of the pond. The pond ... is beautiful, upon the western, especially on the eastern side. On the north and south are communications with swamps. The lands, near Pleasant Pond, are like the dungeons are in great hollows, but too much cleared of wood."*⁽⁸⁾ (*Needing fuel for cooking and heat, people had felled nearly all of the trees, around the pond.*)

Just sixty years later (1860), Dr. Myron Allen, in his book "The History of Wenham," described a much different view of the area. He eloquently wrote: *"A beautiful sheet of water ..., so hemmed in by surrounding hills and forests, as to be entirely concealed from a visitor, until he comes suddenly upon its banks.*

*A little eminence upon its eastern border presents one of the finest prospects in the town. On the other side, the eye rests upon the smooth surface of the peaceful lake, embowered in dense foliage of the surrounding forests of evergreen; and beyond this upon the thick verdure of the swamp, while still further, the view is limited by the fertile hills.”*⁷ (The missing trees, lamented by Reverend Bentley, had grown back, in just 6 decades.)

While the local Indians may have fished and hunted, at Pleasant Pond, it is unlikely they camped near it, since it was, as Dr Allen wrote, “so closely hemmed in by surrounding hills and forests, as to be entirely concealed from a visitor.”⁷

In looking at the topographic map of the area around Pleasant Pond (*right*), you see that it is a relatively small area, protruding into the marshland, (covering over 2,000 acres), known as Wenham’s Great Swamp.¹⁰

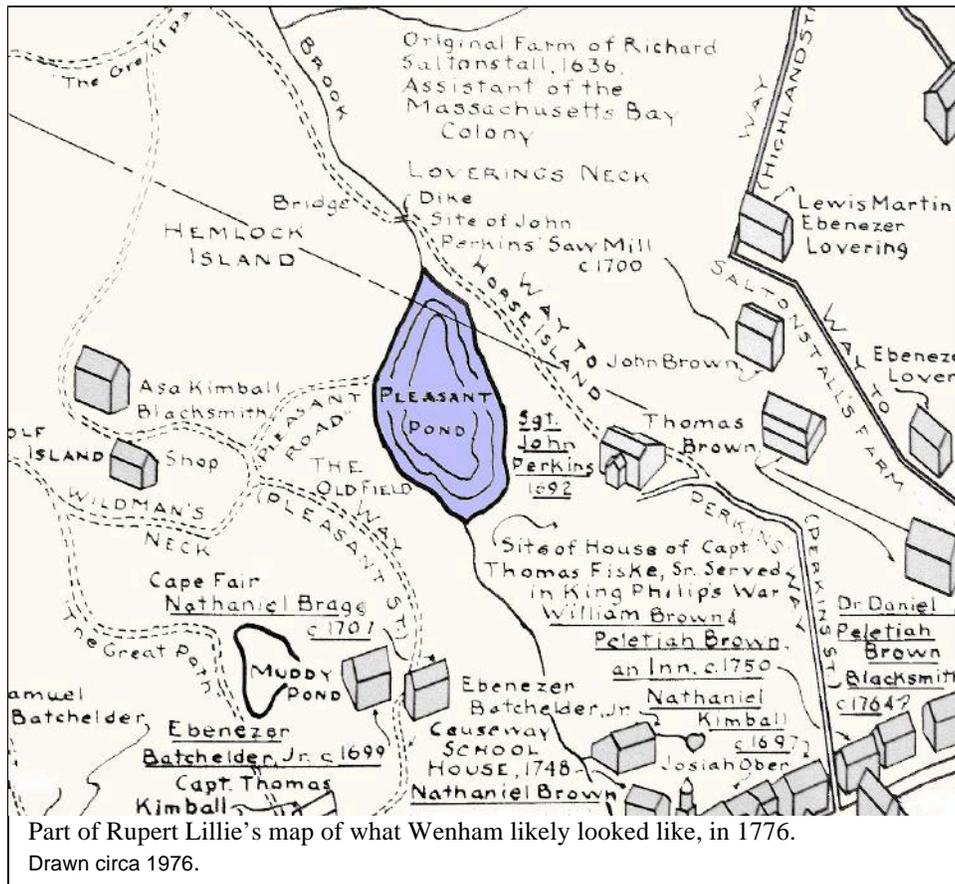
It is not clear who first owned this remote section of land.

The first European settler to own land, abutting the pond, on its eastern side, may have been Francis Felmingham, in 1637. The first large grant of land, in that section of what was then part of Salem, was of 200 acres granted by the town of Salem to Francis Felmingham, on Jan. 15, 1637 or 8. The rectangular grant stretched along the north side of Main Street (*then called “Country Road”*); down from the Ipswich (*now Hamilton*) town line to the meetinghouse; and bounded on the northeast by the Ipswich line to Pleasant Pond. Felmingham never lived upon the land, so it reverted back to the Bay Company.¹¹

In 1642, before the town of Wenham was set off from Salem, Richard Rayment was granted 100 acres of upland and 10 acres of meadow, within the bounds of Enon (*Wenham*). The property stretched, from Wenham Lake to Pleasant Pond, and the great swamp.¹¹ It, too, was probably a rectangular-swath of land.

In 1643, William Porter purchased a large tract of land extending from Wenham Lake to Pleasant Pond. (*Perhaps this was the Rayment property, or a separate stretch of land.*) Descendants of the Porter family owned much of the land near the pond, for over 200 years.¹²

The first mention of Pleasant Pond, in Wenham Town Records, is the purchase of land (50 acres), bounded by the pond, by John Edwards, on Dec. 29, 1663.



While certainly out of the way, for most early settlers, the Great Wenham Swamp had its attractions. There are a great many small peat meadows that were a valuable source of fuel, for the 17th-century families.¹ Also, islands, in the swamp, were a valuable source for swamp hay.¹¹ The road into the swamp was called "The Way to Horse Island."

In 1643, John Shepley was allowed to build a malt mill, on what was then known as Raccoon Brook. The mill was just north of Pleasant Pond. In 1656, when Shepley left Wenham, to move to Chelmsford, along with a large group of people from Wenham, the property was purchased by William Fiske. A few years later, John Porter acquired the mill.¹ Subsequently, the mill property was owned by Charles Perkins⁷, and F. Whitman²⁷.

There was a dike on the brook, and a nearby wood bridge, where the Way to Horse Island crossed the brook. (*The Way to Horse Island started at the end of Perkins St.*) The dike provided increased water power to the mill. (*There is no information about when and who built the dike or the bridge.*)

On the north and east sides of Pleasant Pond, the map, drawn by Rupert Lillie (*above*), shows that Sergeant John Perkins may have owned the entire stretch of land, that now is in both Wenham and Hamilton, from at least the late 1700s.⁷ (*John Perkins, 1590-1654, was sergeant of the Allied English and the friendly aboriginal Indians under their chief Masconomet during the 1631 war with the Tarratines, that came down from Maine.*)

In his map, of what Wenham looked like in 1776, Lillie did not show any homes located directly around Pleasant Pond. However, Lillie only indicated the locations of permanent residences.⁷

Apparently, from Lillie's map, much of the land north of the pond, in what was originally called "The Hamlet," a section of Ipswich, was owned by descendants of Sir Richard Saltonstall.

The 1945 Wenham Annual Report included a street map of the town. Streets were shown to be only on the west and south sides of Pleasant Pond.⁽³¹⁾ (*Being a Wenham report, naturally it did not show the Hamilton streets, on the northeast end of the pond.*)

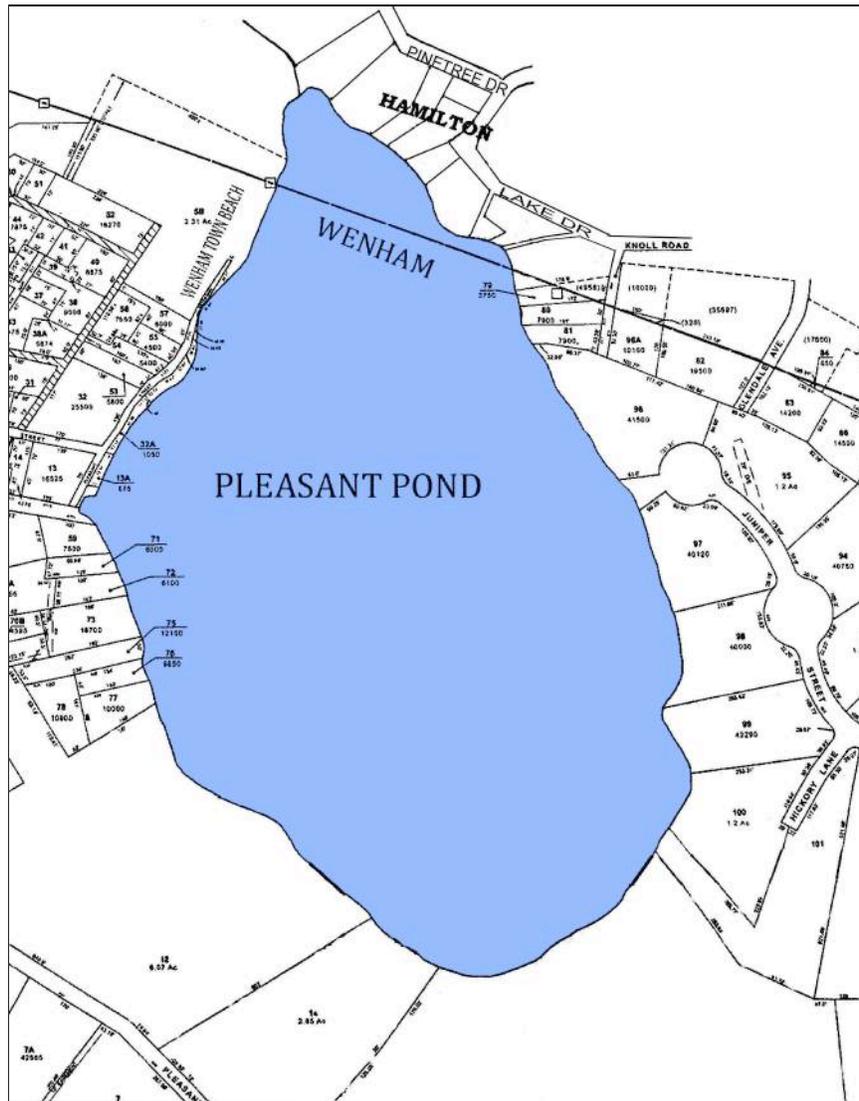
The southwest area, around Pleasant Pond, starting in the mid 1800s, became a very popular summer vacationing site.

There were many small bungalows – euphemistically called cottages -- in the area.

The area has been known by several names:

- In the late 1700s, Lillie's map shows that it was called "The Old Field."
- A 1910 map of Walker Lithograph Publishing shows most of the area was owned by S. M. Knowlton.²⁷
- In the 1945 Wenham Town Report map, the area is called Batchelder Park, the name by which it now goes. (*Fred M. Batchelder owned land around the pond in the early 1900s.*)³¹
- In error, a 1988 Wenham report, referred to this area as the Remington property.⁽²⁸⁾ (*The Remington property - 19 acres - is south of the pond, and is where a Wenham town well is located.*)

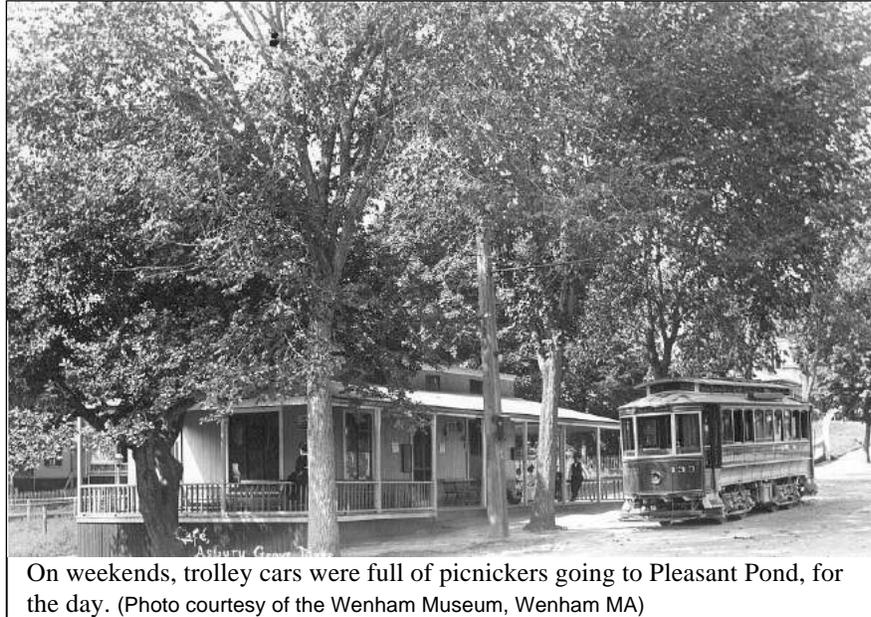
In the early 1900s, many of the current year-round homes around Pleasant Pond were summer bungalows/cottages. Families owning properties around the pond, during the start of the 20th century, were: S. M. Knowlton, G. H. Herrick, Hicks, C. Eliot, Mrs. B. H. Conant, J. H. Perkins, O. Batchelder, Mrs. C. A. Roap, F. Roap, J. Killam, E. Merrill, Pierce, Nicholson, E. H. Doane, O. Hosmer, and a Miss Hunt.²⁷



There are 37 properties directly abutting Pleasant Pond, with 27 being in Wenham.

During the 1930's Great Depression, some families, in need of an affordable place to live, moved into the summer bungalows, on both sides of the pond. They lived in them, year-round, after much make-shift winterizing, to make them livable during the cold months. Newspapers and magazines were used as insulation between the inner and outer walls of the bungalows.³⁰

Today (2009), there are 37 properties directly on the shore of Pleasant Pond (*left*). Of these, 27 are in Wenham.¹² Most property sizes are small



On weekends, trolley cars were full of picnickers going to Pleasant Pond, for the day. (Photo courtesy of the Wenham Museum, Wenham MA)

(a few less than 2,000 sq ft), except for those along the eastern ridge, the Juniper Street area, in Wenham, which are about an acre.

The largest property abutting the pond is at the south end. It covers 17.88 acres and is owned by the Town of Wenham.

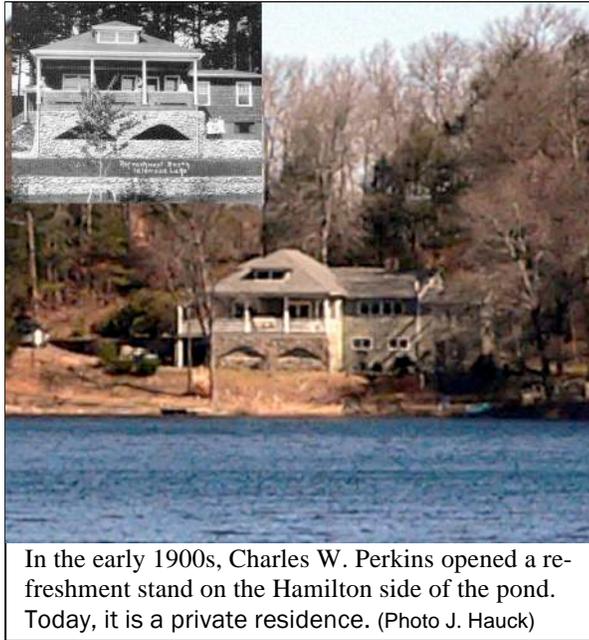
A cemetery, some-times, is mentioned as having been near Pleasant Pond, but there is no record of its existence.

A great fishing hole

Pleasant Pond has long been a great fishing hole. Today, the pond, which is controlled by the State, is a very popular location, among trout fishermen: it is well stocked, annually, by the State. Good sized trout are caught at Pleasant Pond, each spring. The pond has such a good reputation, among trout fishermen, that out-of-state license plates are often seen, in the parking lot.³⁰

In the early 1960s, the pond became overly infested with undesirable fish. In 1964, the State pumped in chemicals to clean out the trash fish. Later, it was restocked with trout and other keepers (*desirable fish*).¹³

In 1965, Paul Hallett described a shocking effort, of the State, to rid the pond of trash fish. "A crew of men cruised around the edge of the pond, using a rig, on front of their boat that sent an electrical shock into the water. Nearby fish were stunned and floated to the surface. Good ones were thrown back."¹⁴



In the early 1900s, Charles W. Perkins opened a refreshment stand on the Hamilton side of the pond. Today, it is a private residence. (Photo J. Hauck)

A year later, Pleasant Pond participated in a State-run fishing tournament. Yellow tags were attached to a few Centennial brook trout. Fishermen, who caught the tagged fish, were awarded a commemorative certificate.¹⁵

During the time that Paul Hallett operated a small store, shop and the boat rental business, on what is now Wenham Beach, he, with funds from local banks and businesses, conducted a tagged fish tournament.

Those, who caught the special trout, received cash awards, and also a certificate.^{30, 16}

A fisheries survey, in 1979, recorded six fish species: largemouth bass, chain pickerel, pumpkinseed, bluegill, red fin pickerel, and brown bullhead. Yellow perch and golden shiners are also known to be present. Trout are stocked every spring and fall — rainbows, brooks and browns. The pond also receives blood-stock salmon, when they are available.³

In 1878, Dr. John C. Phillips wrote: “*The pond has* suitable water temperature, one of the elements necessary, for a successful establishment of salmon. The bottom temperature at Pleasant Pond, in 45 feet of water, is 42 degrees, in the hottest season. Plenty cool enough for any salmoned fish.”⁴

Town records are replete with mentions of stocking the Pond.¹⁷

April Meeting, 1875 - A fish committee was chosen to lease & stock Pleasant Pond & that they be instructed to report from year to year, to the selectmen, what action they have taken.

February Meeting, 1877 - The fish committee submitted a report of their doings in stocking Pleasant Pond with Lake Champlain Black Bass.

March Meeting, 1879 - Fish Committee reported they obtained between 5 to 6 thousand young land-locked salmon, from the state, May 13th, 1878, & put them in the inlet of Pleasant Pond.

In 1966, small mouth bass were introduced to the pond, for the first time. At the time, the State classified Pleasant Pond as a “reclaimed pond,” which means that the number of fish that can be caught, in a day, is restricted.¹⁶

Currently, the State stocks the pond three times, each year. In the fall, it is stocked with salmon.

Well-known resort

From the mid 1800s, until the mid 1900s, the north end of Pleasant Pond was a well-frequented summer resort. It was where many families went, for their summer vacation.

Some people recall there was a hotel, not far from Pleasant Pond. They say it burned down, but cannot recall when.

Few people had cars, so transportation, in the early days, was by railroad and street-car. Starting in 1839, the Eastern Railroad Company ran service to Wenham-Hamilton. In 1871, track was extended, from Wenham Depot, to Asbury Grove. The service lasted, until 1900.¹¹

There also was streetcar service. On weekends, trolley cars were full of picnickers going to the pond for a pleasant day of pond-side activities. They came from Salem, Beverly, and many other nearby towns. The route was north on Route 1A (*Main Street*), through Wenham, down Railroad Avenue to Willow Street, then, via Asbury Street, to Asbury Grove. The picnickers walked through the Grove to Idlewood Park.² that stretched around the north end of the pond.

A not very pleasant party took place at Pleasant Pond in 1966. Just over a dozen teenage boys from Beverly held a drinking party at the pond. It was billed as an opening day fishing party, strangely to be held at night. Neighbors called the police, who apprehended the young people and prevented other carloads of teenagers, none of whom had any fishing gear, from reaching the pond.³⁹



In 1908, Conant photographed the dancehall. ⁽²⁾
(Photo courtesy Wenham Museum)



Hallett's was a very popular part of Pleasant Pond until the mid 1960s.
(Photo courtesy of the Wenham Museum)

The first recorded recreation facilities at the pond existed sometime in the mid 1800s. At the Hamilton side of the pond, there was Idlewood Park. It was open to the public, and had a refreshment booth, boat rentals and a dance pavilion. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Dr. Allen, in 1860 book, called it, a "charming resort."⁹

Close by, in what is now the Perkins St. area, was Summerwood Park,

a development of summer cottages. In 1899, 178 lots reportedly were sold, in the park.¹⁸

Further evidence of the pond being a very popular recreation spot is an 1888 Wenham Selectmen's report, which states James T. Smith, of Salem, was licensed to run his steamboat, the Gail Hamilton, on Pleasant Pond. The boat could carry up to 45 passengers, at one time.² Quite a big boat, for such a relatively small pond. (No information has been found about where the boat docked.)

Why the name Gail Hamilton?

This was the pen name for Mary Abigail Dodge, a writer and essayist from Hamilton, who championed equality of education and occupation, for women. She was born March 31, 1833, in Hamilton.¹⁸

Starting sometime, in the early 1900s, Charles W. Perkins opened another refreshment stand, on the Hamilton side of the pond. His site was south of the previous dancehall complex.

At first, the structure was a simple open-sided, one-room stand. With increased business, it soon was expanded, with a 2-level addition. Next, it was further enlarged to include a store, snack-bar, and dance hall. There also were a separate boathouse, dock, and a field for outdoor games. There was a small private beach for swimming, and Perkins had rowboats and canoes, for hire.²

With the Gail Hamilton no longer puttering about the Pleasant Pond, Perkins began operating a small passenger motorboat: it took up to 12 passengers.²

Since 1966, the State has banned all forms of powerboats, from Pleasant Pond.

Around 1920, competition arose, on Wenham side of the pond. Directly across from the Perkins' facility, Arthur Germaine opened a convenience store, built a small dock and a public beach for swimming; he also rented boats and canoes. The use of his swimming place was free, as contrasted to Perkins' charge of 10¢ per person. Art's rental boats cost 5 ¢ an hour less.²



Today, Hallett's beach is owned by the Town of Wenham. It's slowly regaining its original beauty. (Photo J. Hauck, 2008)

A 1910 map shows a Miss. Hunt was the previous owner of what became the Germaine property.²⁰

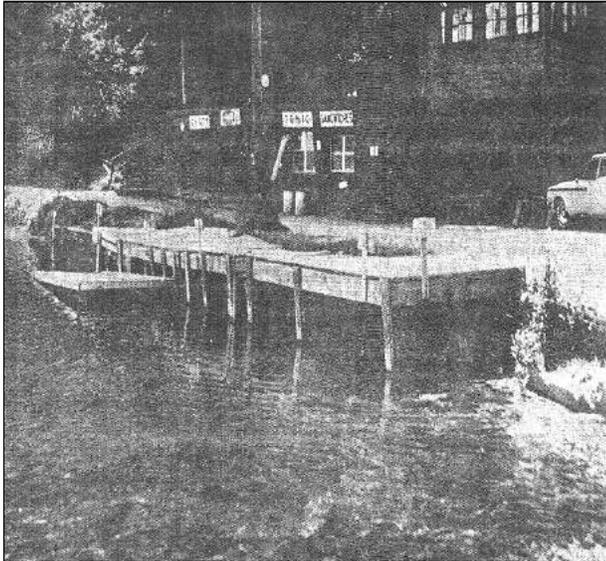
During the 1920s, Germaine's was a favorite of many young people from Wenham. After a hot day, at school, they would go swimming – for free, at Germaine's beach. To get there, they went up along the pond's east side and crossed a wooden bridge over Pleasant Pond Brook.²

Why was the bridge removed?

The following is an article, from The Beverly Times, August 16, 1924; entitled "*Barbed Wire and Moats Bar Crossing at Pleasant Pond*"²

"After commenting, on what he considered unfair competition, Mr. Perkins destroyed the bridge. Since, passage from one side to the other was possible, for agile persons, who could walk a row of logs laid across the brook. Later, even the logs were removed. Perkins built a high embankment, and a couple of water-filled excavations, which gave additional difficulty, to anyone so hardy as to attempt the crossing. He also strung a barbed wire fence across the brook."

Crossing the brook was no longer an option. The only alternative was a drive of several miles. Sometimes, people used Germaine's boats, to row across the lake, to the Perkins' dance hall.²



In 1966, after over 30 years in business, Paul Hallett sold the property, to the Town of Wenham. (Photo, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle)

Perkins' park ceased soon after Charles Perkins died, in the mid 1940s. However, Perkins' place is not totally gone. What was the Perkins refreshment shop and dancehall is an attractive pond-side home (259 Lakeview Ave.), which still retains the stone arches, once so prominent a part of Perkins' place.

In the early 1930s, Germaine sold his property, store and boat leasing business, to Paul Hallett.³⁰ Paul would be-

come one of the most liked people, in Wenham. When you hired a boat from him, to go fishing, you also got great information, on where the trout were biting. Once you met Paul, you would never forget him: he weighed well over 300 pounds. In the winter, they'd say you knew the ice was safe, after Paul had walked over it.

Besides fishing, another great attraction, at Wenham's beach, was a large picnic area, complete with picnic tables and camp-fire grills. But, for the kids, the highlight was a high water slide.³⁰

In 1966, after over 30 years in business, Paul Hallett sold the property, to the Town of Wenham. The beach area is now operated by the Town.²¹ this was the end of boat leasing and refreshment booths, on Pleasant Pond.

When Hallett's property was made available, the town also had an opportunity to buy a YMCA campground, at the south end of the pond; however, the town chose not to buy it. But some say, the offer was withdrawn.

The purchase of the Hallett property was called "Wenham's biggest decision of 1966."²² Discussions about acquiring the property had started, in late 1965, when Paul Hallett offered the property, with its shop, store, garage, 3 camp sites and 3 homes to the town, for \$30,000.

Some people said that this was not the right spot to acquire: swimming there, they said, was not safe. Some questioned where to get the money to cover the added cost of police duty, at the pond.

No problem, some said, the town could continue the boat rental business, and income from this would cover the added cost, for the police. (*The town's Fincom was not in favor of the town running a boat rental business.*)²⁸



Pleasant Pond once had an ice business. The old ice house now is an attractive pond-side home.
(Photo J. Hauck, 2009)

The State was willing to pick up half the asking price, for the 3.17 acre site, as part of a "Self Help" program.²³ (*The current town property map shows the site to be 2.31 acres.*) Discussions dragged on, for over seven months, before the Town acquired the property, for \$29,250. Additional money was authorized to raze, the three houses on the site, as well as other structures and the dock.

But, it still was not a done deal. Two months later, the sale was challenged. There was a question about Hallett's deed of ownership. It was found that the former Thomas Proctor estate, 720 acres, in Topsfield, Hamilton and Wenham, had been given, some years earlier, to the Massachusetts Audubon Society: some of Hallett's property was part of Proctor's gift. (*A 1910 map of the pond, shows this parcel of land was owned by C. Damon heirs.*²⁷) The matter was resolved, and the Town took full possession of the site.²⁴

Today, only Hallett's beach remains. The fun is gone, except for fishermen; but, some of the natural beauty is coming back.

Paul Hallett, reportedly, did not plan on altogether departing from Pleasant Pond. He is said to have planned to build a sportsman club, on an adjacent piece of his property, which was in Hamilton. (*A 1910 map shows this property was owned by Mrs. Hunt.*²⁰) Why Hamilton and not Wenham? A very simple reason: what would a sportsmen club be without

alcoholic libations? Wenham was dry and Hamilton not. But, the Pleasant Pond Sportsmen Club never came to fruition.³⁰

Summer and spring were not the only seasons for recreation activities at Pleasant Pond. During the winters of the late 1800s, there was horse-trotting, on Pleasant Pond. When the pond was deeply frozen, a race track was cleared. N. T. Conrad and Levi Lord were leaders, in the Driving Club, composed of members from Wenham and adjoining towns. The races were watched by large crowds.³⁴

During the late 1800s, there was an ice skating rink, above the old mill dike, on Idlewild Brook.³⁷

After the demise of an ice harvesting business, some locals used the pond for ice-boating.³⁰ There always has been good ice fishing. Pickerel, yellow perch and salmon are to be had, which provide moderate action, for the die-hard winter fisherman.

How safe is Pleasant Pond?

There is an old town-tale that claims an Indian maiden, very distressed at having been abruptly jilted, by her suitor, chose to end her life, by jumping off the eastern ridge; whereupon she drowned.³⁰ Her gaunt ghost may still unhappily wander the woods, along the eastern ridge.

One of the first reports of anyone drowning, at the pond, was in 1856. Dr Allen wrote: "This beautiful spot, once so delightful and charming a resort, has lately become connected with associations of a melancholy character. As several young men were here amusing themselves in skating, Dec. 19, 1856, one of them, Mr. Joseph P. Cook broke through the ice, and before help could reach him was drowned." ⁹ (*Note: Sidney Perley wrote that the date was Dec. 10, 1856.*)¹¹

Following an increase in people drowning in the mid 1900s, it is said, by some, that Pleasant Pond was renamed Idlewood Pond. Some years later, the name reverted to Pleasant Pond (*a synonym for "pleasant" is "idyllic."*). The name changed, but drownings continued. In July 1966, a sixteen year old boy from Salem died.⁴¹

Yes, we all know about the ice businesses, which once flourished around Wenham Lake. But, Pleasant Pond also had its ice business.³⁰

While Pleasant Pond, in many recent years, has not had very thick ice, there was a time, during the heydays of ice businesses, in Wenham, that Pleasant Pond's ice was very thick, and reliably so, year after year, right up through February.

If Wenham Lake's ice was called the "Queen's favorite ice," might Pleasant Pond's ice have been called the "Prince's preferred ice."

Who owned the ice business on Pleasant Pond? Some think the name on the ice house, which was near the south-west end, was Putnam. It

may have been owned by Charles. W. Mears, who also owned ice houses on Chebacco and Beck's ponds, in Hamilton.

Blocks of ice were drawn, by horse, to the ice house located on the low rise, just off the shore. On a slide, leading up to the ice-house, ice blocks were pushed up, for storage. The ice house had double wooden walls: the space between the walls was filled with wood shavings, hay, or sawdust, to insulate the building. Ice also was stored in separate sheds, which were on a large field, just off of Pleasant Street.

In probably the most all-inclusive book about the 19th century Massachusetts ice trade, "Crystal Blocks of Yankee Coldness," the author, Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, makes no mention of the Pleasant Pond facility. Nor are there any reports of the ice business in town records: there are references to the Wenham Lake ice business.

Summer camp grounds

Camping has long been a part of Pleasant Pond's history. Rupert Lillie's map of 1776 Wenham shows that there was an "Old Field," situated on the pond's southwest end. No information is available that describes what the Old Field was, or who owned it, nor for what was it was used.

The first recorded use of the Old Field area was an 8-acre summer camp, called Pine Knoll Camp. It was owned by William Connors, a Wenham selectman. The camp was open to youngsters from many nearby towns. It had half a dozen craft huts, a large field for sports, and a small beach.³⁰ There also were horse stables on the western side of Pleasant Street.

In 1964, Connors hired Carmen Herrick, Sr. to be the camp's caretaker. Herrick lived next door to the camp, with his family, for 20 years. Their home was what had been the ice house. The ice house is still there. Prior to the Herricks moving in, it was converted into an attractive residential home.³⁰ *(The Herrick name has long been a part of Pleasant Pond's history. A 1910 map shows that G. H. Herrick lived close to where the ice house stood.)*





Connors, later in 1964, sold the Pine Knoll camp grounds to the Malden YMCA. Beginning in June 1965, the Malden YMCA opened Camp Madaca (*an acronym for Malden Day Camp*).

Madaca, was open from June to Labor Day, for to 8 to 12 year-olds, boys and girls, from Malden, Everett and Revere. During their two weeks of camp, the youngsters were bused in and out, each day, in as many as a dozen buses. At Madaca, they enjoyed crafts, swimming, and archery, and even go-carts.

Here's how one person recalls her Madaca days: *"My memories of swimming, shooting arrows, running around the field and bonding, with my fellow kids, then running for the bus home, like a bat out of hell, and then collapsing in bed at night, will live on."*²⁵

In addition to the 8 acres directly on the pond, the YMCA owned three sites on the other side of Pleasant Street. (*Note: For some unknown reason, Pleasant Street once was referred to as "Sodom."*)⁽¹⁾

On the main property, the YMCA built a large building, for indoor activities, when it rained, and to house a kitchen. Attached to this building was an open-air pavilion, for serving meals.³⁰ The beach area was expanded, and a house on the beach was removed.

Boy, did those kids have fun. They were making so much noise that a woman, living, on the other side of the pond, complained to the police.

Well, they quieted down. But, at the end of the day, before getting on their buses, to go home, they'd go to the water's edge and loudly sing, "Good night Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are. We will be back again, in the morning."^{30, 42} (*Ed note: her name was not Calabash.*)

In 1984, the Foundation for Continuing Education (*FCE*) purchased the Y camp.³⁰

The site now is a corporate function center, and is called the Boston Conference Center. FCE has a private beach, and various sports courts and fields. The open-air pavilion can accommodate 300; there is a conference room, with a spectacular view overlooking Pleasant Pond.³⁰

Other than the FCE center, most of the property around Pleasant Pond has remained fairly dormant, for the past 40 odd years. This is pretty much since the Town of Wenham purchased the Hallett property (3.17 acres), in 1966 for \$28,250. Shortly after, the town tore down all of its structures.⁴⁰

In recent years there has been increasing pressure, from residents, to reclaim the pond and its surrounding area. These efforts have been spearheaded by Regina and Dave Baker.

In 2004, Pleasant Pond was included on the Essex County Landscape Inventory, as a valuable and historical natural feature. The , published in a May 2005 report, was part of a study sponsored by the Essex National Heritage Commission, as part of an ongoing effort to identify areas, sites and landscape of value in Essex County.

On June 11, 2005, the Pleasant Pond Association began holding a Beach Clean-Up Day, which has become an annual event.³⁵ People, from both towns, even selectmen, come out, to help bring Pleasant Pond back to what it used to be: a recreation area for both town residents to cherish and share.

A Master Plan, for Pleasant Pond, was completed, in 2006.³⁴

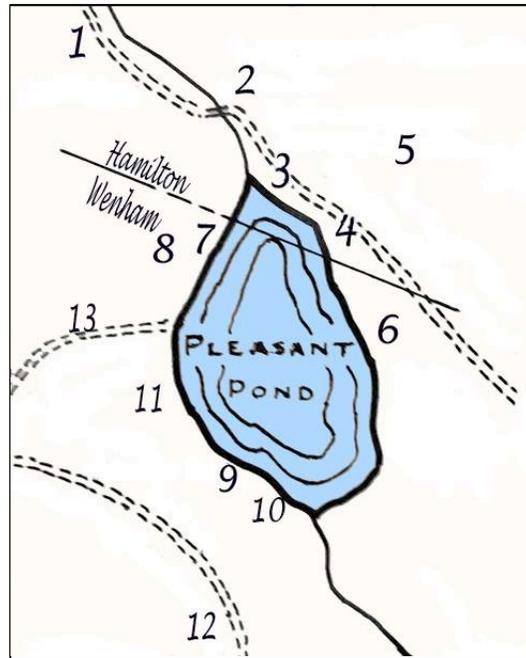
In the spring of 2007, The Pleasant Pond Association received \$36,800, from the towns of Hamilton and Wenham, from appropriations from each town's Community Preservation Funds, for landscape improvements. The purpose of the Landscape Improvement Plan is to protect and rehabilitate the Pleasant Pond Beach area, so that it will continue to be there for generations to come, and to improve the space for parking and recreation.³⁴



*Well, here I am alone,
With my back against a tree.
Oh, what a serene sight I see.
What soothing sounds I hear,
And to have, so long, not known
this beauty was so near.*

Adapted from *The pond*, by Louise
Gluck

(Photo, J. Hauck , 2009)



Historic Sites Around Pleasant Pond

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1 | Way to Horse Island | 8 | Idlewood |
| 2 | Bridge | 9 | Ice house |
| 3 | Dance hall | 10 | Pine Knoll/Madaca camps |
| 4 | Perkin's | 11 | The Old Field |
| 5 | Summerwood | 12 | Pleasant Street |
| 6 | Idlewood Ridge | 13 | Pleasant Road |
| 7 | Germaine's/Hallett's | | |

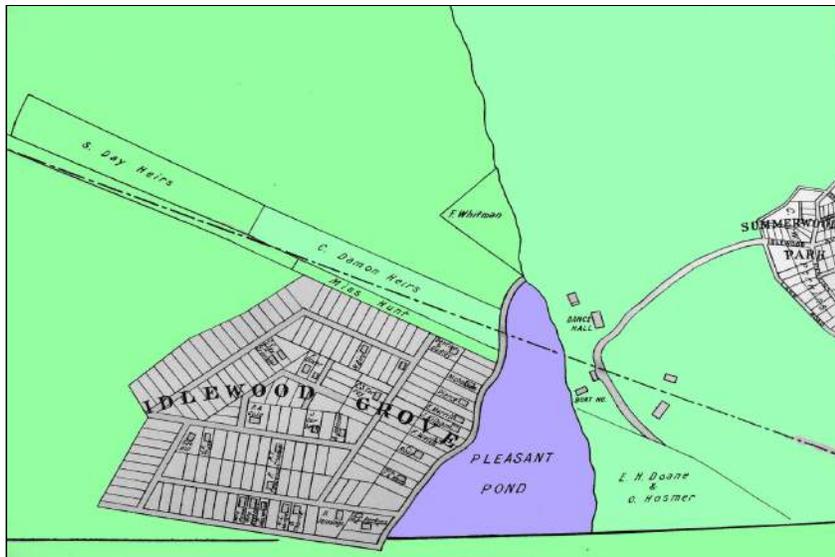
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Other Pleasant Pond pictures



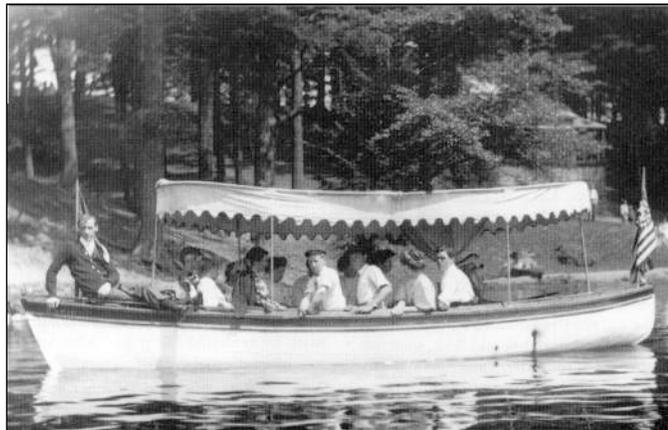
There were two areas of summer cottages at north end of Pleasant Pond, in the 1800s.



Batchelder section, at southwest edge of Pleasant Pond. FCE center is at lower right.



Foundation for Continuing Education, viewed from pond's edge. (Photo, J. Hauck , 2009)



Perkins motor launch took up to 12 people for ride about the pond. (Photo courtesy of the Wenham Museum)



Original Perkins refreshment stand, before expansion
(Photo courtesy of the Wenham Museum, Wenham MA)



Stone arches, from old Perkins building, still are part of pond side home. (Photo, J. Hauck , 2009)

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