

BRHS News June 2019

Researching and preserving our history

From Our Archives



Sleigh ride, possibly around 1910, Elbridge Giles (1878 - 1937), Pitchpine Hill



The circa 1895 view looks east from the discontinued Pitch Pine Hill Road to East Boothbay. On the far left are houses near the turn to Meadow Cove Road. Strung along the field bisected by the present road to the village and occupied by the Thompkins-Grazziano house, are the old Chesebro houses (now the Haney houses) on the old road to Murray Hill. Those houses are fairly hidden today by growth. In the middle of the photo is the 1890 C.U. Hall and toward the right, the Methodist Church.

Mud 125 Years Ago

By Barbara Rumsey
(written in spring 2005)

This time of year a little talk about mud is in order; March and April were still called mud time when I was young here in the 1950s. As the decades pass by, the long age of rural dirt roads recedes, and only people in their 80s remember most of the local roads as untarred and many parts of town not electrified—pre-modern, you could say. Tarring of Boothbay roads started slowly in the mid-1920s and continued at a quickened pace in the 1930s and for the rest of the century. It's now hard to find a gravel town road. Also, it's impossible to find many magnificent stone walls which disappeared in the 1930s when local farmers sold them to the state's mobile rock crushing machines for road beds. Before general tarring, complaints of road conditions were as perennial a topic as complaints about the weather.

Many Boothbay Registers from the 1890s are unavailable anywhere. I've read all the Pemaquid Messengers I could find from that period to try to fill in some Boothbay news. One memorable news item on road conditions was in the March 15, 1894 issue—right in the middle of mud time. "The travelling by team now is a conglomerated mixture of sleighing and wheeling, and a considerable amount of neither. One heavy rain could make good boating." That guy across the river or two was a great writer with a real flair for pithy understatement. A favorite quagmire between the Harbor and East Boothbay was Pitch Pine Hill.

Fifteen years ago I wrote a couple of articles about Pitch Pine Rock on Pitch Pine Hill and the old roads north and west of East Boothbay that met there, a major intersection between the village and

the Harbor. After writing the pieces, I gathered more information, which is below. As you veer south toward the village of East Boothbay, just before the turn to Meadow Cove Road, there's a now-private road that heads off north and west—the old road to the Harbor that went west over Pitch Pine Rock when wet or out around through a swamp when dry. It terminated at the Jim Kidd-Maidie Demers [Martin Page 2019] Hardscrabble Farm near the town line. Pitch Pine Rock is now an isolated area, but before the road to the Harbor was altered into a sweeping quarter-mile dip south in 1897, it was a well-known landmark and a newsworthy subject.

The place name Pitch Pine Rock goes back to at least the 1790s, since a 1796 road description mentioned it. Its name, if anyone was here to name it, could date back to soon after the ice age, since apparently it's a place where only lichen, moss, and pitch pine can grow. A certain elevation and sparseness of soil seems to demand pitch pine; you'll notice in your travels that about 50 to 100 feet up on ledge is a growth of bristly, scraggly pitch pine. Its tenacious, bare, gnarly but statuesque presence is beautiful to me.

In three August 1878 Boothbay Registers, there were repeated complaints about the road. The August 10 issue reported, "We hear much complaint of the road to East Boothbay. It is certainly bad enough to drag over Pitch Pine Hill without being obliged to wallow through mud holes and ruts." It sounds like the road was a popular and venerable object of scorn. The following week, the paper reported, "Those mud holes have been filled up. Now start at Sheriff Boyd's [near the turn to Bayville] and strike out around south of Pitch Pine Hill, coming out this side of the village and then we can drive to Ocean Point without dread." This suggestion was eventually put into action, with the present road's configuration. Bill Tompkins

After I printed the Pitch Pine Rock articles in 1990, Bill Tompkins, who owned Pitch Pine Hill and lived where the road takes off (now Adrienne Graziano) near Meadow Cove, wrote me. He'd retired from manning the stockroom at Goudy's and moved up to Friendship. Bill reminisced about buying the property in 1947 and remembered that people, such as Sonny Hodgdon and some of Ardene Abbott's family, used to drive up in there in the mid-1900s. Bill was told that in the late 1800s, "In the spring when the road was too wet for a horse and wagon, they drove across the rock. They needed to rebuild the road, but after driving an iron rod 30 feet down into the swamp without hitting bottom, they decided to build the road down the hill." I guess 200 years of people, oxen, horse, wagon, and vehicle traffic couldn't drive all the pitch pine off the rock.

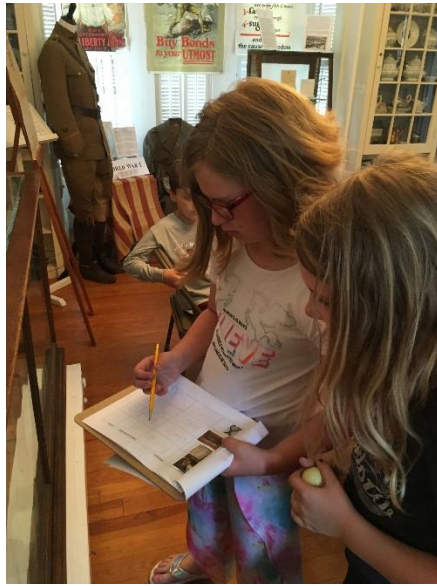
In those days of hand shovels and wheelbarrows and getting fill from the roadside, bottomless swamps and other seemingly intractable barriers to smooth and straight roads were avoided rather than battled. That wouldn't happen today when diesel engines and hydraulics transform a day's hard work into a trifling five-minute task. The ease of such wholesale destruction or construction seems not quite right. Fill comes from miles away in huge dump trucks instead of 50 feet away by the shovelful from a private homeowner. I remember Carroll Gray telling me that, back after dump trucks were developed but loaders were still in the future, dump truck drivers were very keen on giving rides to people, and people enjoyed the novelty of getting a chance to board a motorized vehicle. What they got for the lift was a detour to a gravel pit and a shovel handed to them to help load the dump truck. I've got to say we've got it pretty easy.

For more articles by Barbara Rumsey check our website
www.boothbayhistorical.org/out-of-our-past

Boothbay Region Elementary School

Third Grade Came to Visit us in June





A wonderful time was had by all!
Here are some comments made by the students:

When we went to the BRHS today, we did a scavenger hunt. My favorite part was the wooden box. The guy who made it was on Barter's Island. He made it for his own entertainment. I thought it was super interesting to go to the Boothbay Region Historical Society. I hope I'm able to go again sometime soon. *Natalie*

I liked how nice the workers were. I love the Historical Society. *Aiden*

I loved the way you prepared a scavenger hunt for us. I did three papers. Cool, right? I loved everything! *Addie*

My favorite thing was the picture of the two boats that were sunk in Mill Cove. *Thomas*

I loved all of the things I saw during the scavenger hunt. And it was awesome! I hope we can go next year in fourth grade. I have three things I liked. And that's the arrowheads, the scary dolls a little bit, and the bell. *Owen*

My favorite objects at the Historical Society were the army badges and the arrowheads. *Peyton*

I like learning about the past. I liked the scavenger hunt. It was fun to find all the things. I love history! *Mahea*

Join us in welcoming Claire Rittershaus as our new Office Manager

Claire comes to us from the Boston area, but her Boothbay roots are deep. Her mother is a Fossett and Claire summered here as a child. Claire's grandmother, Alice Fossett, was a volunteer at Boothbay Region Historical Society.

We are very pleased to welcome Claire to BRHS!



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our history program is presented in the classroom to third
graders at BRES at no charge.

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*Come visit! We're open year-round,
Thursday through Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm.*

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