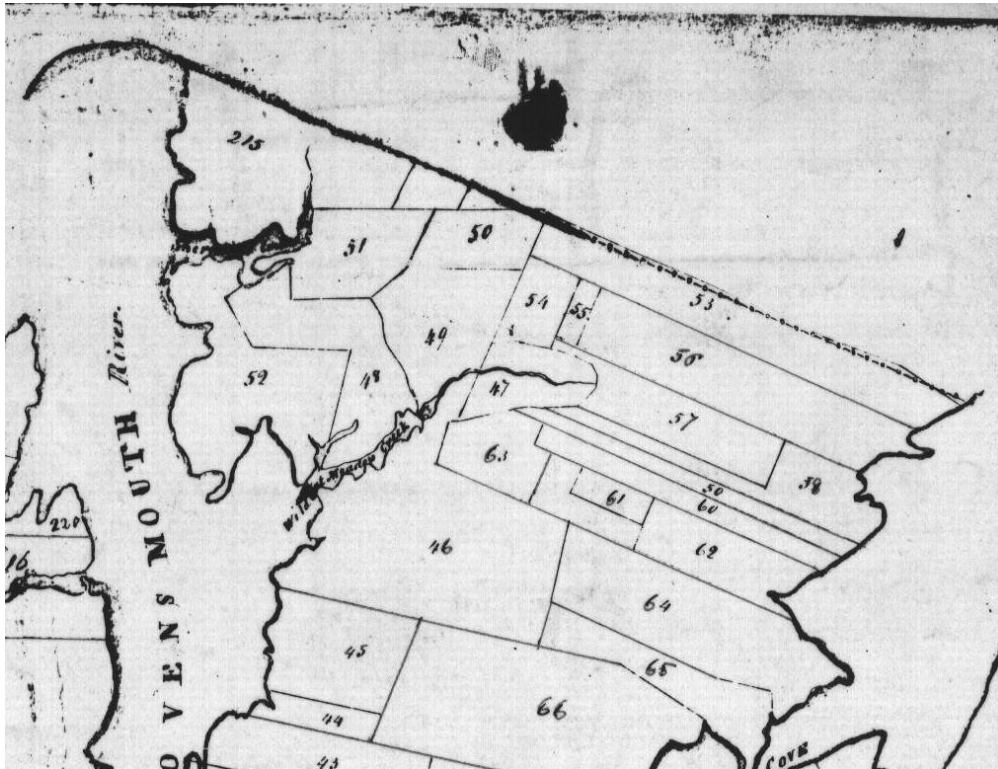


BRHS News November 2019

Researching and preserving our history

From Our Archives



The Wildcat Meadow Creek in 1815. The little creek near the outlet was "Thatch Creek." It seems to have disappeared now. Alleys owned lots 52 and 48. Shermans owned lots 49, 50, 51, 59, and 215. Knights owned lots 53, 54, 55, 57, and 63. Ichabod Pinkham heirs owned lot 47. Ichabod's son, Nathaniel Pinkham, owned lot 46; much of it was later owned by Flora Jones. The modern town tax map R-5 is surprisingly faithful to the 1815 lot layout.

Wildcat

By Barbara Rumsey
(Written in 2004)

Wildcat Meadow Creek is located on the upper reaches of Boothbay, old topos showing the waterway starting a mile up into Edgecomb and meandering down to meet Ovens Mouth River by what was once the Ponderosa Campground below the turn to Burleigh Hill.

Wildcat was priceless to the early Boothbay settlers, as were all salt or fresh marshes to local and New England settlers. Reliant on themselves and their own land for food, shelter, and heat, settlers (and other animals) were drawn to marshes like magnets. In such place fresh water grass or salt marsh hay and other foodstuffs could be found, without the labor of felling trees, hauling rock, and bringing the land under cultivation. The lay of the land itself--and beavers at times--created the natural farmland for hungry people and the livestock they relied upon.

The Alley family owned Wildcat's outlet in the 1700s and 1800s and saw mill potential at the spot. Along the winding marshy expanse, the Sherman and Knight families were the principal owners. The upper part of Boothbay was really the breadbasket, and the Shermans lived out that description. For instance, in the early 1820s Elisha Sherman had two swine, 10 head of cattle, two oxen, a horse, seven acres of mowing and tillage, and three pasture acres. Altogether the four Shermans in that area had 28 acres of mowing and tillage, 23 pasture acres, and 135 other acres unrelated to farming but necessary to the self-reliant life style, providing firewood among other things. Clearly the Shermans were farmers. The four Knights who owned land in the area had more diversified land holdings, such as Outer Heron and Damariscove Island, fewer livestock, and they tended to go to sea. But no matter how versatile 19th-century families might have been in their pursuits, just about all of them grew their own vegetables and had a small amount of livestock, at least a cow and a pig. The whole family was also enlisted to gather food that grew almost unaided, such as berries.

I'd asked oldtimers Hazel McCobb Poore and Asa Tupper Sr. about Wildcat in the early 1990s, and they both remembered the gate-doors under Wildcat bridge that functioned as a dam when needed to protect whatever crop was valued at Wildcat--hay and/or cranberries.

Reuben McFarland, who died in 1993, was a great guy, and I videoed two of my visits in 1987 and 1988. He was Charles O. Schmid's right-hand man, managing his properties for decades. One Schmid parcel, visible from Wildcat bridge (now culvert), ranged along Wildcat to the River Road, and one of Reuben's last acts for the Schmid's was to clearcut it to pay Mrs. Schmid's nursing home bills in the late 1980s. I believe Guy Peaslee owns it now [2004]. Reuben also grew up not far from Wildcat, on the old McFarland place on Walker Road off the River Road. You get up into Wildcat and you're closer to the Damariscotta River than you are Ovens Mouth River. So it was natural for Reuben to pick stuff up about the area. But I'll let him tell it.

Reuben McFarland's Memories

"Well, we'll go up to Wildcat now, Barbara, we'll go up to Wildcat. We want to talk about the floodgates up underneath there. I remember the old floodgates at Wildcat. Back in 1928, 1930 somewhere around there they got a new road, and of course they had to build new ones. Gene Woodward down here, he was the blacksmith, he made all the irons and they swung on hinges. The doors swung from the top, and had a big latch on the top, a wooden latch and when they wanted to, they'd hook it up. It was to keep the saltwater from going up into the marsh which used to be nothing but cranberry bogs. Everyone around, all the farmers, had an acre or a half acre of cranberries. Cranberry was the thing in those days, you know, everybody had cranberries, I don't know why they don't nowadays. Each one bought a little patch in the cranberry bog.

There weren't any cranberries there that I know of when I was a kid, but I heard about it from my parents, from John Burnham, from Ralph Burnham and all the Burnhams, they owned all that land in there, you know. Our deed sets in there, and we got kind of interested in it and so we asked around. Then way up, about third of the way up, you'll see an old line up across there. Years and years ago, there was a beaver dam across there, a real big one too. Of course, that's all washed up now."

The Name

Wildcats were certainly in Boothbay in the 1700s. The town had a bounty on them most years from 1767 to 1787, though bears and wildcats were worth half a wolf carcass. Crow bounties were a distant third. A story came down to Red Giles that a Colbath girl was killed by a wildcat at Colbath's Hill. That's in the area of the Fish & Game Club, and Colbaths were here only in the 1760s to the 1780s—right in the bounty period. I assume the threat from wildcats lessened toward 1800 or the town decided to get out of the business of collecting animal ears.

Both Asa and Hazel confirmed Reuben's account of Wildcat's name derivation: "Years ago they used to have huge pines trees with limbs that would go right across the road, a wildcat or any kind of cat always traveled in trees, they avoided travel on the ground. You see a cat in the woods, you never see a cat on the ground, he'd run right up an old dead tree, jump to another tree, jump to another dead tree, they'd stay in a tree like an ape does more or less. They'd see them going across and that's why that was always called 'Wildcat' in there." So the pines that used to line Wildcat were the wildcats' preferred much higher overpass, a way to keep their paws dry.

In my time spent with 18th and early 19th-century deeds, I'd noticed that Wildcat and other meadows, such as Little Meadow in East Boothbay, were divvied up into tiny parcels. When something is highly valued, it gets chopped up into tiny pieces. The difference is, back in a self-sufficient time, land was valued for the raw material it could generate; and the meadow's bounty included hay, cranberries, potential water power, and the animals it drew. Now land value is divorced from its raw materials and the chop-up comes from other pressures.

Look at Boothbay and its offspring, the Harbor. In 1815 it was divided into about 255 separate properties, most of them about 50 acres, some much bigger, a few a little smaller. As of 2004, Barters Island alone, divided into 16 parcels in 1815, was split up into about 350 parcels, even with no business district. We're pretty squeezed, but the Wildcat area still has that old look of lovely fields and marshes.

EVENTS

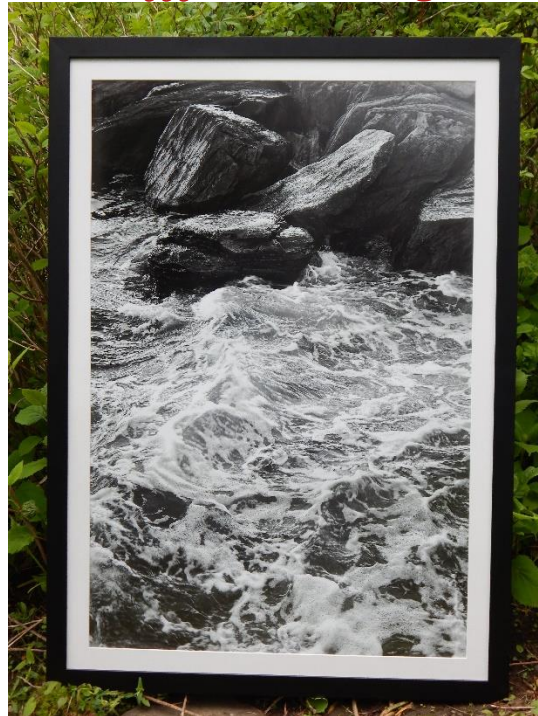
Saturday, December 7, 10 am to 2 pm

Holiday Open House!

Everyone is invited to join us for a delicious, heartwarming, cozy, festive event you won't want to miss.



*and
Raffle Drawing!*



Turbulent Sea at Ocean Point, photograph by Robert Mitchell
Handsomely framed in black with an acid-free mat, 41" high x 29" wide.

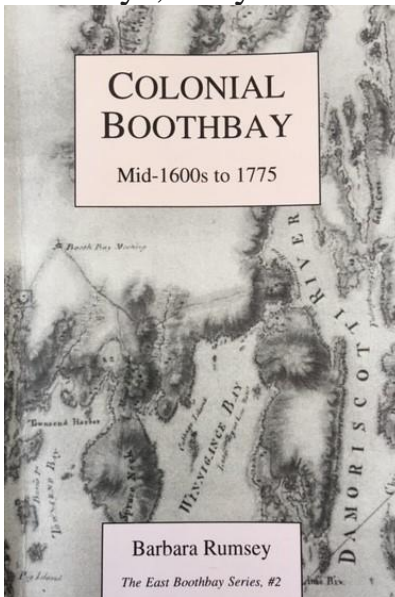
Did you buy your raffle ticket yet? Just one dollar per ticket, or six for five dollars. Please [click here](#) for more information.

**And thank you in advance for supporting our BRHS fundraisers.
We depend on you, and you always come through.**

For more information on upcoming events, please check our website's [Events Calendar](#).

MUSEUM SHOP

And speaking of holidays, are you still looking for gifts?



This illuminating and beautifully written book begins:

My interest in local history began in 1986, and I soon grew fascinated with the most remote and mysterious early region settlers, those who arrived in the mid-1600s. Growing up in the village of East Boothbay and living there again now, it is with great pleasure that I tell you that East Boothbay had an integral role in the earliest history of the Boothbay region. I like to walk, and when I lived on East Boothbay's Linekin Neck in the 1970s and 1980s, most of my walking was done at Ocean Point. Though I took thousands of walks at that place, the views of the islands off Ocean Point, so central to seventeenth-century history, remained tirelessly entrancing. I always took a few minutes during my walks to mentally step back in time and try to imagine how those areas looked to seventeenth-century settlers.

Colonial Boothbay: Mid-1600s to 1775, by Barbara Rumsey, \$16
Call us for your copy.



If you are looking for a gift for someone who loves Boothbay,
a membership to Boothbay Region Historical Society,
or a donation in their name, also makes a wonderful gift!



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