

Ponds Take Town from Sawmills to Camps

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Otis was originally part of Plan #8, a huge tract of land that became known as Dedham.

The land itself was owned by various merchants and speculators from Boston, among whom can be found one Joseph Otis. He was a prominent merchant and president of an insurance company.

Joseph Otis and his wife, Fanny Russell, moved to Ellsworth in 1828, then on to Otis in 1836. He owned a sawmill and store there.

The town of Otis was incorporated on March 19, 1835, encompassing a territory four miles wide and seven miles long. Woodbury Stover, G.S. Drinkwater, Charles E. Barrett and Joseph Otis were listed as the principal landowners when the town was separated from Dedham.

The community would include Flood's, Rocky, Burnt and Beech Hill ponds and part of Springy Pond. There were a number of excellent mill sites at these places, sites which would contribute greatly to the economy of the community.

The principal mill sites were at Beech Hill Stream, Warren's mills at Tannery Stream, including a grist mill, Remick's mills at the outlet to Floods Pond and Hillier's mill at Springy Pond. The families of Otis, Hopkins, Wilbur, Remick, Hiller and Salisbury ran these mills.

The community began its decline after 1880, primarily due to the scarcity of prime timber and the changing economies of that era. Those who remained farmed the land and cut pulp in the winter.

The most important development occurred in the 1890s when sportsmen came to the community to fish at Floods and Beech Hill Ponds, or else to hunt in the fields and forests of the community. Many local families provided lodging and meals, with the menfolk serving as guides.

By 1915, the first camps had been built on Beech Hill Pond. The automobile made it possible for families from Bangor, Brewer and Ellsworth to have ready access to this new recreation. The local community turned this new activity into a profit, selling camp lots, fresh meat and produce, as well as their skills as carpenters and caretakers.

The growth of family camps on Beech Hill Pond signaled a great change in the economy, a change from farming and lumbering to recreation. Beech Hill Pond, today, is the greatest factor in the economy of the community.

The women of Otis made significant contributions to the community in the 20th century. Their efforts led to the building of the Otis Baptist Church and the Otis Civic Center.