Thompson-Ames Historical Society - 3/27/08 News Release

The Development of Gilford's Welch Island on Lake Winnipesaukee

Maps Showing Welch Island Settlement from 1906-1941 and 1984

Written by: Elizabeth A. Mead

This island was first named Lot #3. Subsequently, it bore the following names: Moulton's, Fisher's, and Thompson's Great prior to becoming Welch Island. For whatever reason Welch

Island stuck and is still known by that name. This 210-acre island was claimed by Jonathan Moulton and then Abraham Welch between 1781 and 1801. The first written deed in 1801 documents the sale of half of it by Abraham Welch to Clement March for the sum of \$160.00. In 1808 Abraham sold another part of the island to Jacob Welch for \$700.00. Apparently, even way back then, real estate increased rapidly in value! John Pickering Smith purchased

Welch Island around 1823 and proceeded to remove some timber, then sold half of the island for \$800 to an Intervale neighbor George Washington Leavitt. Leavitt, raised sheep but his mainland pasture was too damp for them, therefore, he brought them to the island in early spring paddling them on a barge. They remained on the island until the lake froze over when he led them back over the ice to the mainland. Around 1842 farm buildings and a wharf were built. This is the earliest recorded reference to a building on a Gilford island. In 1859 Leavitt sold some of his land, but kept his pasture and continued to bring his sheep to the

SMARD TO THE STAND TO STAND THE STAN

island for an additional twenty years. When a barge load of animals was lost in a sudden storm his island pasturing of the sheep came to an end.

The island shows grazing evidence and early photos show open fields near a stone wall, which persisted until the 1920s. Remaining near the pasture are the foundations of a simple shepherd's hut. Contrary to what one might think, the stone wall was not to contain the sheep, a pole fence was used for that. The wall was actually used to separate the sheep from a corn field. Corn was one of the crops raised to provide feed for the sheep. Hay was also used especially for young stock.

Between 1859 and 1875 the Winnepesaukee Lake Cotton and Wool Manufacturing Company of Lake Village acquired all of Welch Island, except for Leavitt's piece. The company was unsuccessful and in 1900 sold its interest in Welch to Joseph Varney of Wolfeboro for \$800. The year before Varney had purchased Leavitt's piece for \$3,760.00. That 1899 deed mentions "a certain camp house and barn situated upon said island and owned by William Wallace and others". Apparently Wallace had put up a fishing shack on Leavitts' land! The island then passed among real estate

speculators ending in 1906 with James French. Around that time the railroad constructed rail lines through Gilford. Taking advantage of this new access to the island, French began selling off lots. Of course, this brought more people to the Island many of them related to one another.

In 1936 The Welch Island Gazette was first issued thanks to the efforts of Mary Donsker, a lifetime islander She sometimes found some young people to help with the writing. This weekly news letter provided all camps with the daily doings of their neighbors, some advertisements, announcements of marriages, social gatherings, a puzzle game, etc. Articles were submitted by whichever residents chose to do so. In the July 1986 50th Anniversary Issue Monroe Donkster shared his list of birds he'd seen on or around the island between the years 1946-1986. It consisted of 80 different birds, some of which were seen only five (5) to ten (10) times during this period, i.e. the Blue-headed Vireo, Northern Water-thrush, Pine Grosbeak and the Red Crossbill. The Gazette continued for 50+ years, however, whether it is still published today is beyond my knowledge. I enjoyed having the opportunity of reading several issues.

After my article "A Little Bit of History About a Lot of Gilford Islands" was published in the January 31, 2008 Steamer I received several phone calls from islanders. I was delighted! One of the most wonderful things about New Hampshire, and a primary reason for my deciding to live here, is the warmth and welcome that is extended to all by its residents, even those born and raised here. I've met with a few of these islanders, one from Welch, which is how I learned about the Gazette; one from Mark and one from Mink. I heard from another lovely lady who has spent her summers on Welch since 1905! and a gentleman from Jolly who assured me that Verizon Wireless is alive and well on Jolly!. From them I also learned that the closeness I perceived about island folks was right on target A loving spirit exists among the island residents that leaves the impression that they are a part and parcel of each others lives and families. Yet, they also offer their friendliness and warmth to non-islanders, even to flatlanders such as myself!

A number of islanders spend their winters locally in their mainland home. I've been given to understand by a few islanders, that there is a difference between mainland, lakefront and island living. The islanders find a peace from their deep connection with nature. They blend with the whispering of trees, the singing of birds, and the sharing of the land with its animal population. The children revel in the freedom island life gives them to be just "children". Mainland noises are left far behind allowing seemingly endless enjoyment and the chance to rejuvenate their spirit and soul. It's no wonder these properties are handed down in families for generations. How lucky the folks who are given the very rare opportunity to purchase land and/or a camp on any one of the islands that for one reason or another is not being handed down but placed on the market. It would seem to me that the sellers would be mighty particular about whom to sell their property wanting to assure the new residents would become true "islanders".