

Thompson –Ames Historical Society
Smith Cove, Gilford on Lake Winnepesaukee
Written by: Don Frost

Looking down from an airplane, Smith Cove looks as if a giant hand with a soup spoon dug up a spoonful of earth and dumped it in the northwest of the hole which became Varney Point. The Point is nearly an island but is connected to the mainland by the Varney Point Road, once known as the Smith Neck (Varney Point) Road and is the north and west side of Smith Cove. The west side of the Varney Point Road is on Sanders Bay and includes Gilford Beach, one of the best beaches on the

big lake. The original Gilford Beach was 200 feet in length and was gifted to the town by Frank Varney but in the 60s after much controversy, the town purchased 1500 feet more from Archie Clement for \$150,000. The old ice house on the beach which had been served by the Lake Shore Railroad



with a siding to the beach for loading ice and transport to Boston was torn down. Varney Point Road originally a dirt road from Sanders Farm to Sanders Neck (Varney Point) was used for getting animals to grazing on the Point. Pictures of the Point in the early days show it to have few trees with plenty of rocks and grass. In 1923, Frank Varney divided the Point into housing lots and houses began to appear until it eventually developed into what we see today. Clarence Henderson who owned lots one and two built an icehouse for locals to use for food cooling. Much of the ice was sold through Clarence's store in Glendale to islanders who came in to pick up their mail and necessities. The mail boxes are in the same place now as they were then. Wilbur Fay opened a small boat yard in 1944 next to the icehouse which grew in years to become Fay's Boat Yard under the ownership of Merrill Fay. The icehouse was torn down in 1970 during an expansion of the boatyard.

The Gunstock Parish, A History of Gilford, by Adair Mulligan reports that one of the first permanent residents of the Cove was Albert (Grampa) Roberts who with his son Nate Albert came up from Acton, Mass in 1880 to build a home and boathouse on the water's edge and provided water taxi service to the islands as well as selling gas and oil for boaters. Nate is reported to have a "knack" with engines. The buildings are still there and in very good condition. Alfred was a "transplant", like so many others occupants of the area. Families would come up

for a summer vacation and come back again to eventually buy a cottage and settle here. However as the years went by, property values have increased and also property taxes, to the point where home owners, especially the older ones have problems coming up with the tax payment. It's not known what Alfred Roberts paid for his property in 1880 but Joe Paterno a retired engineer, in looking over his papers for his cottage on Smith Cove found a tax receipt for the year 1906 for his property as being \$6.29. The property tax for the same property for 2008 is \$10,826 reflecting the increased value of shore property. For many years with the rail lines coming to the Lakes region and to the Alton Bay area there was much interest in a shore line railroad. The large rail companies argued back and forth but finally a company started a rail line to connect Lake Village (Lakeport) with Alton Bay. Construction started in 1884 and was completed in 1889. The new railroad station turned Glendale into a hive of summer activity. Summer residents could come from great distances For example the Neidager family from Philadelphia would pack up their summer things and take a train to New York, then to Boston South Station, somehow to North Station to catch the train to Lakeport where they would shift to the Lake Shore line to Glendale and then on to Smith Cove. After a couple of months they would reverse the trek. Must have been a grueling day. Mr. Neidager could only come up for a short period during the summer... Train fare was relatively inexpensive and one could travel from Lake Village to Concord for 80 cents or go all the way to Boston for \$2.30. Travel to Lake Village from Glendale cost only a few cents and took about fifteen minutes. Noah Goss opened a store in Glendale around 1900 and supplied some of the necessities as well as ice cream a novel new delight. Noah doubled as a station master for the new rail station and though he wore a straw hat most of the time he put on his gold braided station masters hat when the train pulled in. The Goss family later sold the store to the Varneys who in turn sold it to Clarence Henderson who kept it to the 1930s when it became the Dockside Restaurant and later Dot's Restaurant. After many years it's now known as the Lyons Den. Mr. Henderson also owned and operated a boatyard and marine railway in Glendale which he later sold to Gus Francis and in turn John Goodhue purchased it. The Goodhue Boatyard operated for many years until a spectacular fire in 1960 destroyed the building. John rebuilt and operated for several more years but sold out to the State of NH for use as a base for the expanded Marine Patrol.

The Goodhues have been prominent in the Cove many years starting with a cottage on the east side of the cove, renting boats and taxi service which later became Tabor's Marina until it was sold to Roy Ostrand who added more slips and when buying a slip became popular he sold his slips individually for a fair price. John Goodhue bought the swamp south of where the Fay Boatyard was and dredged part of that to make a marina for two barge companies. The Winnepesaukee Yacht Club purchased some land to make a boat storage yard as well as a marine railway south of that. During the 1950s the land on the south side of the Cove where the railroad trestle was, was purchased by John Goodhue and dredged out for another marina. which is now the Gilford Yacht Club. Merrill Fay who contributed much to this article tells the story that back in

1840 the Smith family, then owners of Smith Point, transferred that property for a pair of boots to the Sanders family. After dredging out the area and filling in where the swamp had been, home sites began appearing.

The water in the Cove is deep enough to handle sailboat keels and it's only a short distance from the pier to the Cove entrance where they hoist sale for the Broads Fays Boatyard has become one of the most popular sailboat moorings. With three marinas plus private slips John Goodhue estimated there are probably 600 to 700 boats that moor in the Cove. Anyone living on an island needs some means of getting to that island as well as needs a good safe place to moor the boat when they've gone for the day or longer. The water in the Cove up until a few years ago was clear and one could see bottom in most areas until milfoil, an exotic weed took hold and became so dense that it made swimming unpleasant and even slowed boat passage. It's been difficult to find a solution that is practical but with chemicals and manual collection there is some hope to control it but it is a continual process.

This has been an interesting article to write visiting and talking with people who have had close contact with the history of the Cove. Bob Ruggiero owner with his wife Maria of the Inn on Smith Cove who came around 1987 to the area and has improved a large section of old buildings to make a perfect vacation spot. Joe Paterno, a longtime resident and wonderful Cove historian who contributed information and pictures, Merrill Fay who has had a great impact on the Cove and its importance, John Goodhue III who with his father and grandfather have been a great addition to the Cove. Thank you all.

Gilford's Thompson Ames Historical Society welcomes comments or suggestions for articles. You can e-mail us at Thomames@worldpath.net or visit our web site at gilfordhistoricalsociety.org Don Frost T-AHS Correspondent