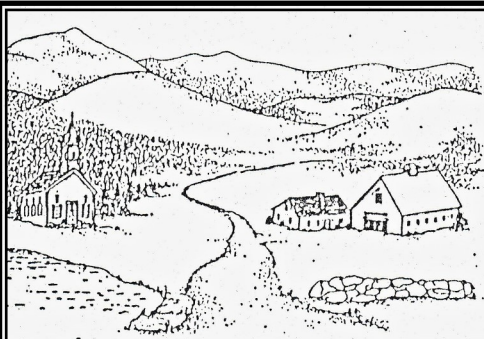




Chatham Times

Past and Present

Fishing in Chatham

(thanks to contributors: George Perry, George Andrews, Joan Bowen, Ron Briggs, Bill Briggs, Henry Mock, Roberta Chandler, Frank Eastman, Jim Layne, Speedy McAllister, David Crouse, Kim Smith, Olin Lusky, Ralph Guptill, and Jim Wilfong)

In years past, fishing was a regular part of life for Chatham folks. As George Perry told me, "We fished for food!" Jim Wilfong's mother would say, "Boys, I don't have anything but potatoes and beans for supper, why don't you go catch some fish." And fishing was part of childhood adventures. When John Chandler was about 10 years old (1940s), he'd go out for the day with George Charles. They'd take a fry pan, a little corn meal, and a piece of salt pork. They'd fish for a while, build a fire and eat some fish, and then fish some more. The only

warning from their mothers had been, "Don't roll any rocks on anyone."

Frank Eastman remembers, "Father (Everett) would snowshoe up to Mountain Pond and ice fish (1910s). He'd set everything up, and when he was done, take everything down. One time the Game Warden was talking to him, saying, 'I go to Mountain Pond and everything is still. Next day I go and the pond is crisscrossed like a checkerboard with snowshoe tracks and fishing holes.' Father never let on who it was." (It was illegal to take trout through the ice, but there were folks who unknowingly, or knowingly, ice-fished and evaded the warden.) Frank says people fished in the beaver pond in Gracie's Meadow, the headwaters of McDonough Brook.

George Andrews remembers when he was in 6th or 7th grade (1960s), "I went ice fishing on Shell Pond with Lawrence Perry and Richie Condon. It was a three mile hike from my house. We stopped by the spring house on Cold River to get a pail full of shiners. And we set out. We went in past the outlet, and stepped out on the Pond. I went in up to my waist. So there was no fishing; we had to go back home, and my clothes were frozen stiff. Lawrence and Richie never went fishing with me again."



Herbert and Maggie Andrews going fishing

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Notes from the President

There are many people to thank again for their work to help learn, gather, preserve, and share our Chatham history. So many! Thank you! I don't usually mention names for fear I'll leave out someone. But I am making an exception. I need to thank my husband, Steve, for putting up with me and helping out with so many projects: trying to decipher the words I have skipped over when transcribing Jonah Hill, Jr.'s 1872 diary; checking gravestones to be sure we have them recorded exactly (He discovered that rubbing sticky snow over the stone makes that letters stand out brilliantly!); proofreading everything I write and making delicate editing suggestions; listening to the new tidbits of Chatham history that I am learning; and, in general, supporting this interest that keeps me from our farming work.

It has been fun talking with so many people about their fishing experiences. If I didn't get to you and your story, please do send it in, by email, phone, a dooryard visit, or old-fashioned paper and stamp. We'd love to preserve your story, and we will not print it unless you give permission. And if you ever find factual errors in our newsletter, we would like to be corrected.

Since we last listed new Society members, there have been several: Stephen Curtis, Norris Eastman, Kristen Poulin, Albert Stearns, Jacky Stearns, Travis Zadeh & Family, Bill Eastman, Sandy Nager & Family, Sylvia Clayton & Family, Grace Eastman & Family, Jeb Eastman & Family, Carol Hudson, Judy McGinty. Welcome!

I have come across lots of interesting information this winter: a small stack of "gold" in Steve's and my home attic – deeds and Town documents (for example, vouchers to pay families for boarding the school teacher, \$1 per week) from 1798 to early 1800s that were moved to this house before the original Eastman house burned in the 1860s, then moved to Fryeburg when this property was sold in 1917, then moved back here in 1996 when that property sold, and the trunk was finally opened again this winter. Also on loan from Judy McGinty and Greg Thurston is information about Jonah Hill's family for us to copy.

Looking ahead in 2021, we are hoping life will get more back to normal and we can start having public programs and events soon. In the meantime, you can find lots of interesting (and fun!) information on our website. Check it out, and send us any comments or suggestions.

We will plan to have our Annual Membership Meeting on May 18th at 6:30 PM. If the weather is nice, we will meet outside. Bring your own lawn chair!

For those of you with Annual Memberships, dues are due in May. Check the address label on

your newsletter to see if your membership needs renewing. We so appreciate your support and your interest in Chatham history!

Jeanne Eastman



Steve Eastman at Charles Cemetery

Henry Mock, who started his career as Game Warden for Chatham in 1965, knew Mountain Pond as the best trout-fishing water in Carroll County, especially first thing in the spring. At that time, no road went near the Pond, so he hiked in, or snowshoed in winter (as did all the fishermen) until the first big orange Moto-Ski was issued to the Warden Service in 1967.

Mock also remembers one day, driving in along the road to Slippery Brook (which he says is well named), he spotted a pick up truck that he knew well. Later, driving back out, he saw the man with his fishing basket “behind him, then in front. Was he trying to hide it?” Mock stopped to chat. “How's the fishing?” “Oh, I got my limit.” “Oh, nice. Can I see your fish?” The man groped inside his basket, pulled out a handful of sphagnum moss, and tipped the basket for Mock to inspect. “One, two, three...,” but out of the corner of his eye, Mock saw a fish tail hanging out of the sphagnum, between the man's fingers. “How many in your hand?” Mock asked. “Only one,” said the man, and he started crying. Mock had arrested him twice in the past for being over the limit; the fisherman just couldn't help himself. Mock also knew that he had been ill. Mock told him, “Well, everyone can make a mistake.....You be careful,” and let him go. Within a year he'd heard that the man had died of his illness.

The smelt in different ponds and brooks ran at different times during the spring, from late-March to early-May. The Perry boys would be boiling maple sap in the garage across the road from their house. (1960s) By late afternoon they'd leave off boiling to go smelting. Depending on where the smelt were running that day, they might go to Kimball Pond, Horseshoe Pond, or as far away as Crooked River. They'd get a spot on the banks of the brooks and wait for dark. Sometimes the brooks would run black with smelts. Sometimes there'd be 40-50 other people along the banks, and sometimes not so many. They'd come home with their catch, feed the fire again, and sleep for a couple hours. After cleaning the smelt, they'd roll them in flour and deep fry them. “I can taste them now!” George says.

Mock remembers patrolling the marshy area of Lower Kimball Pond near the outlet of Province Brook during the smelting season. Other wardens had warned him, “Don't go there by yourself. Things get rough,” And it was tough going over snow and ice, breaking through into mud. But he'd meet the local guys, and they were always calm, friendly, and happy to see him. He'd check their licenses; Maine or New Hampshire licenses were accepted as it was right on the border.

When the marshy area was sold to Doug Forbes in the 1970s, Forbes dug out the shallow area where fish lived and brought in fill on which the Kimball Lake Shores development was built. The change in conditions, as well new laws limiting where and how late into the night one could net smelt, ended the local smelting.

George Andrews remembers one smelting expedition, “I was 14. My grandfather (Herbert Andrews) told me, 'In the ice house, on top of the freezer, is something for you.' It was a two-quart jug of hard cider. He thought I was old enough to learn to drink cider. So I took the jug, left mid-afternoon, and walked past Shell Pond over to Horseshoe Pond, where I met Billy Lord, the game warden's son. After we finished the 2-quart jug and had our smelt we were ready to head home. But I got turned around in the dark, and spent the night by a horse pasture at a logging camp in Stoneham. When morning came I could see the mountains to orient myself and found my way home. I had the worst case of dysentery, and never drank hard cider again.”



Millard Chandler and son John

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Ron and Bill Briggs' father, Harold, was an avid fisherman and encouraged the boys to fish. (1960s) Ron tagged along when Bill went brook fishing, but soon decided he liked exploring other things better than swatting black flies and mosquitoes. However, they all would go down to Ken & Elsie's Place on Lower Kimball after supper, where they would rent a rowboat for \$1 or \$2, and fish from 7 to 9 PM, catching perch and horn pout. Ron remembers releasing the perch, and bringing the hornpout to Sumner Hamilton in Stow.

George Perry remembers when his mother, Claire, was digging dandelion greens in the spring. She'd say, "Why don't you boys go catch some trout to go with these dandelion greens." The Perry boys fished in all the streams around, starting behind their house. "As we went downstream, the fish got bigger, past Wiggins', past Ross's. We used to catch suckers in Ross's brook, and give them to Gary Wilfong – he liked to eat suckers. Down to Bickford Lake, which was just a widening of Bradley Brook; you could cast your line right to the other side. Eight- or ten-inch trout would be under the bank." When a ditch was dug in the early 1970s straightening Bradley Brook in an attempt to drain the field to improve the agriculture, the fishing changed. The fish couldn't get up by the Ross's and the Wiggins' anymore because there was a little waterfall at the bottom by the new ditch.

Evans Notch Road

Kim Smith recalled fishing nearly every day and that when the wild strawberries were ripe, Alan Wilfong would use a few berries as bait to catch trout at Bickford Lake.

George Andrews used to spear suckers in the pools below the AMC dam. His mother would cook up a meal of suckers once each spring. Olin Lusky remembers going suckering with John Chandler and Joe Emerson "about the time the peepers started peeping. The suckers in Kimball were muddy tasting." So they went to Charles Pond, Ezra Heald Bridge, or Evan's Brook. The suckers are so bony that they weren't prime, but they'd share them with other families in town.

Olin Lusky was usually too busy helping on his family's farm to fish. But if it was raining too hard, Olin, with his brother, Paul, and father, (c. 1950) would have a day to fish. "Paul and I would each take a different branch of Charles Brook, and Father (Fred), would start up at the Chandler Gorge and fish down.

Ralph Gupstill fished some near home (the old Merritt Clay house in Stow), and sometimes he and his father, Wallace, (c.1940) would follow the Cold River up Evan's Notch, where trout could be found in the pools even up near the height of land.



HOW NOW, BROWN TROUT?—Everybody's happy here except the eight-pound brown trout Gary Wilfong landed from Cold River at Stow, Me. The 13-year-old Wallonian struck the big beauty on a spinning outfit. Realizing the tackle was too light, he ran home to get a heavy handline and snagged the 29-incher on his first toss . . . with a worm.

Gary Wilfong 29 inch trout, 1962

Before the Basin dam was built, Perry remembers, "The basin meadow used to have beaver dams, and one little water hole after another where brook trout could be caught. I'd cast in, and the water would turn black with trout. Then after you'd catch eight or nine, they'd stop biting." Perry feels that the dams that were put in in the 1970s at the Basin, Colton, and McDonough brooks have cut off the natural spawning grounds for many fish.

Roberta Chandler remembers her husband, John, fishing in the Cold River soon after they were married. "Bill Hastings was the Game Warden covering Chatham in the early 1960s. He told Ervin Lord, the Maine State Warden whose territory included that part of the Cold River that was all but in Chatham at some points, 'You'll have a hard time catching these

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Harold Andrews

guys up here. They know every inch of these woods.'

"One day Lord recognized John Chandler's truck, and when John came walking back from the Cold River, Lord was waiting for him. "How are they biting?" he says. "Oh, pretty good." "Suppose we ought to count them out?" John had not kept count of how many fish he had in his creel, the leg of an old pair of pants that I had fashioned for him. He was mighty uncomfortable as Lord counted out his fish every so slowly. Fortunately, he came to ten, the limit, and there were no more. After that I dropped John off to fish so that his truck would not be parked nearby."

Joan Bowen remembers fishing one morning on Upper Kimball Lake, "I was fishing with my son Peter who was about 8 years old. I had salt pork for bait because an old timer, Bill Gray, who used to visit, said that was the best bait for pickerel. 'Cut it the a "V" shape, hook on the top part, and whip it around so it looks like a little fish.' I got a big fish, but it went under a log and got disconnected. We were out of bait, so we went down the road where a girl was selling bait worms. So we tried again, and Peter got a fish on his line. I said, "Let me help you," and I took his line and got the fish in. It was a 22-inch pickerel. I said, "That's the same fish that was on my line." He said, "I don't believe that - it's my fish!" So we took the fish in and cleaned it, and in the stomach was the salt pork with a long

hook. No one else used salt pork."

Jim Wilfong remembers he was sitting on the back porch (1850 Main Road) reading the Hardy Boys when his brother, Gary, came running up from the Cold River. "You got to see this trout," with his arms wide, showing its length. He found some heavier equipment: a salt water line and a big hook, and ran back to the river. In a half hour, he came running back, screaming, "Look, Jim!" He had a 29½-inch brown trout. Inside of that fish was an 8-inch brook trout that had just been swallowed. A photographer from the Portland Press Herald came to get a photo, and soon the Associated Press had the news all over the country. People would come to Chatham to see the boy who caught that fish. And they'd buy worms (1 cent each) that the Wilfong boys collected during heavy rains to sell to fishermen who went down their driveway to the river.

Wilfong also remembers fishing adventures with his brothers and the McAllister and Perry boys (1960s). His mother always said as they left, having no idea where they were going, "Now, Jimmy, don't let the boys drown." They'd strike off through the woods for No Ketchum Pond. They'd use baling twine to lash dead spruce logs together for rafts to fish from. Or they'd go to Mountain Pond where they could stay in the cabin built by the CCC. They cut up dead spruce and fir for firewood, and always left the woodbox full in case a lost or cold hunter stopped there for shelter or refuge from a storm. Extra cans of food were left in the squirrel-proof cupboard.

When Herbert, Nelson, and Norman Eastman were kids (1930s-40s), they decided it would be nice to have a boat at Mountain Pond. Their team of oxen (practically pets) pulled the square-ended row boat up the mountain on a scoot. Once there, the boys decided to take a boat ride. On looking back to the east, the team of oxen was swimming behind them, still hitched to the scoot. So the boys turned back. Norman, the best teamster, picked the goad stick off the yoke, and turned the team back to shore. Jim Wilfong remembers years later, rowing Everett Eastman across the pond to the cabin. The boat was kept there for anyone to use.

Henry Mock occasionally checked Langdon Brook, but seldom saw anyone fishing there. But he wasn't there at school recess time! Bill Briggs remembers as a student at the Chatham Center School (1960s), "We used

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to go down to the river fishing at 9 o'clock recess, or lunch break. One time we caught a sucker, and brought it back up and filled the iron sink down in the basement with water and put it in there. When Mrs. Andrews went down later, there was a scream: she wasn't expecting that!"

And George Perry recalls as a student at the school, "Sometimes the kids would bring their poles and a can of worms and go down to fish in the river during recess. Sometimes, we wouldn't hear the bell ring. One time, my brother, Dick, and I had come back from the river, just a little too soon to get right on the bus (Cora Thurston's car). Mrs. Andrews chased us around and around, downstairs, through the basement and back up, until we could see the bus was there and we grabbed our fish and poles by the door and jumped into the bus. Mrs. Andrews never seemed to remember to punish us the next day."

Jim Wilfong says that sometimes he and his friends didn't have the \$2 for an out-of-state license to fish in the Cold River. He and Ormie McAllister and Carl Perry would collect returnable bottles, wash them in the pond next door, and take them to Maynard Record's store in North Fryeburg. Eventually they'd have enough money so they'd all have licenses. But when Ervin Lord met them at the river, he never asked to see their licenses. Fish were stocked at all the bridges in town, and the kids knew when the Hatchery trucks were coming. They'd race on their bikes after the trucks to catch some fish before they dispersed up and downstream.

Fishing has changed today. While Jim Layne remembers (1960s) his son catching 65 trout between the Barnes Road Bridge and the house (by Bradley Brook Hill) in just a short time, today Speed McAllister doesn't even bother to buy a license. She says, "The last time I bought an in-state license it was \$43, and we went up to the Basin and didn't even get a bite. And I used to fish in all the brooks, but now I don't know if I am on someone's land illegally." Former Warden, Mock, says that out-of-state fishing licenses are selling at an all time record number, especially during this pandemic. The Basin, Lower Kimball, Mountain Ponds and Slippery Brook in Chatham were stocked in 2020, but I haven't heard any big fish tales lately.

Fish Tales

Old Bill Sanborn (1874-1959)
from his column in the Advertiser-Democrat

There is a little place up here where I go fishing for pickerel sometimes, and I was about out of fish hooks, so I went to looking over the catalogs in the house. I found one hook where it said, "Sure death to Wall Eyed Pike, Pickerel and Bass," thinks I, "that is the fish-hook for me" so I sent for it.

I got pretty fish hungry by the time it came so I took it and started. Well, I fished and fished and didn't get a bite, I was disgusted with it, and then thought I might as well throw it away and try one of my old hooks, so I threw that hook as far as I could out into the water. Before I could get out another hook I heard something sloshing around in the water at my feet, I looked and there was a dandy pickerel. I grabbed him and put him in my fish basket. By that time I saw another coming, I grabbed him and so I kept at it till I had twenty-three and I did not know what to make of it. I never saw fish chase themselves right out of water before and I thought I was going bug-house till I heard an awful flopping and sloshing up under Walter McKeen's bridge. I ran there as fast as I could leg it and I am a liar if there wasn't two of the biggest pickerel I ever saw driven right into the stone abutments of that bridge and that fish hook was jumping first at one and then the other keeping them in there. I got hold of that hook and put it in a tin box in my picket but I saw I couldn't get those two pickerel without a crowbar, so I left them up there. You see that hook would chase around in the water and drive the fish right out to me like a dog driving cattle.

Oh, yes, their guarantee was all and more than the catalogue claimed for it.

Instructions for Making a “Fish Carrier.”

by Roberta Chandler

Cut a 12-14 inch section from the lower portion of the leg(that being the least worn out) of a pair of discarded green Dickies (work pants). While some other brand of trousers might work, Skinny Jeans would not be acceptable !

Turn inside out, and machine stitch two rows across the wider open end, for the bottom of the carrier. Fold down about 1 and 1/2 inches at top. Turn under edge and stitch, leaving opening for drawstring. Turn right side again. I used boot laces for drawstring, and it results in an over the shoulder bag, which is ideal for a brook trout fisherman. Moist ferns can keep the fish cool and (hopefully) comfortable until they reach their final destination!

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Veterans’ Memorial (\$100 for a paver with a veteran’s name)

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\$10.00 /person/year

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