Issue 141 September 2024

Building Basin Pond

By Jeanne Eastman
Photos Contributed by Greg Thurston and Sandra Layne Greenleaf

Waters from the Cold River and its tributaries caused almost annual flooding in North Fryeburg, interrupting farming operations and flooding the roads. In 1960 the population of Chatham had fallen to 150 residents, and to 108 in Stow. A plan to control flood waters and stimulate the economies of Chatham and Stow was formulated by the Carroll County Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and several local and federal conservation agencies. They planned to build four flood retarding structures, two multi-purpose dams & recreation areas, and to clear 23,500 feet of river channel. These projects would create jobs and, when complete, services catering to the tourists expected to come to swim, fish, picnic, camp, boat, skate, relax, and enjoy nature who would in turn bring money to the towns. (Work Plan: Cold River – Old Course Saco Watershed, 1966)

Big Basin in 1922

The proposed dam sites were at Great Basin, Shell Pond, Cold River by the AMC Cold River Camp, Colton Brook, McDonough Brook and Langdon Brook by Deep Meadow Farm. The Basin was on US Forest Service land, the others on private land.

By 1968, preliminary work was moving along, as recorded by Millard Chandler in his diary. **April 20:** went to Carlton's back field where they have yarded pulp & logs from right of way and lake site. **May 10:** Walt (Charles) came over in eve & he & I studied map of proposed Cold River dam plan. **Oct 14:** I worked for USFS bulldozed a yard & yarded out wood cut on new campground & road sites in Basin. Damn rough place to work. Stumps & boulders plentiful. **Nov 1:** Soil Conservation men have many flags in our field & Walts (Charles) where they will dig holes with a backhoe to test soil. Believe they will start soon.

The Basin dam before flooding

Herman Johnson and his boys, Hermie, Roger, and Johnny, cleared the trees and brush in what would become Basin Pond. Dave Weathers, who had just started work with Soil Conservation Service in

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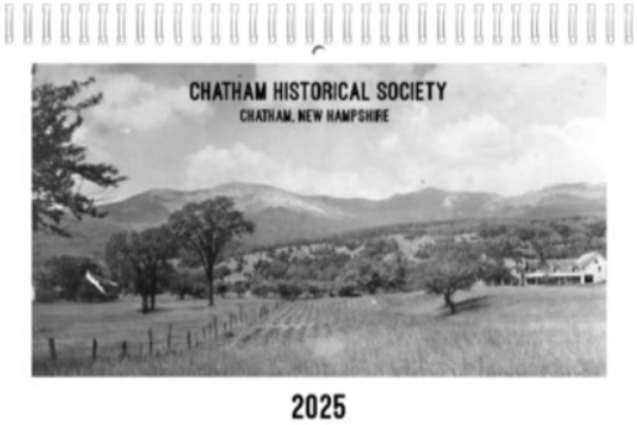
Notes from the President

We have had a wonderful, busy summer. Our program on local Native Americans drew a "standing-room only" crowd despite predictions of tornadoes. We participated in the Summer Bazaar at Fryeburg Fairgrounds, selling food, raffle tickets, and books; thanks to Alina Eastman for donating table space for us. And we had a great turnout for our Ice Cream Social where Jim Wilfong told stories of growing up in the Cold River Valley. Thanks to Ann Fargo for chairing the event and donating the ice cream.

We have a new book on our sales table: *Visits with our Chatham Neighbors from Back in the Day*. Many people contributed stories and sketches. A huge thank you to Brenna Schneider for formatting the book in such an attractive style. We have created an "activities and coloring book" that supplements the stories. And we are collecting more stories for Volume 2!

We also are taking orders for a 2025 calendar featuring historic photos of Chatham. Each calendar costs $24. Please add $5 if you'd like us to ship a calendar. Orders will be taken until November 1st.



The cover of the 2025 Historical Society Calendar

Thanks to John Stryker and his crew for completing the next phase of construction on our building. The old bathroom stalls have been removed to make more storage space. The basement ceiling and the heat ducts have been reinstalled.

Jeanne Eastman

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Contact Us

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Board Meetings

April – October, 3rd Tuesday, 6:30 PM

Open Hours

Tuesdays 9 – Noon
We look forward to seeing you!

The Peddler's Pack

a bundle of news from the neighbors over the years

George Perry: There used to be a string of small pools. It was great trout fishing. The water would turn black with fish. After we caught a couple they'd disappear, and we'd move on to the next pool.

From Edifying, by **Ed Jones**: Rob Potwin ran a portable sawmill in Carlton Basin (behind what used to be Otis and Dorcas Carlton's farm). The road into the Basin was called Potwin's Parkway. It was made out of sawdust and slabs. The road is now at the bottom of Basin Pond.

Frank Eastman: Potwin was sawing railroad ties (6”x8”x6'6”) back of the Basin in the 1950s. The road in was corduroy & soft. My brother, Norman, hauled truckloads of lumber for him; he would put on chains and gun it so as not to get stuck. Harold Andrews fished nearly every day in his rowboat at Basin. Once when asked how the fishing was he said, “They're not taking worms, but red squirrel is working pretty good.”

Paul Lusky: There were very long beaver dams stretching across the level land where the pond now is located. The last time that I was in that area, I could see evidence of the Potwin's mill site. My father and Uncle Gordon Gilman chopped in the woods one winter there. They were given a chain saw to replace the crosscut saws that they were using. They spent a good part of the first day trying to start the saw with no success. That was the end of the chain saw experiment as they continued the rest of the winter using crosscut saws which started with the first pull.

Jim Wilfong: My brothers and I would climb down inside the overflow structure, block water until it built up behind us and would shoot us out under the dam into the pool on the other side. Once the Forest Service found out about that, they padlocked a cover so we couldn't get into the structure. I helped fight a forest fire on Basin Rim in 1963. The Basin was full of swampy beaver ponds that we had to cross.

Margery Eastman: Before Basin Pond was made, the hiking trails at the Basin were boggy, wet, corduroy trails made out of the slabs from the saw mill that had been there.

Mildred Andrews' log of Boarding House: July 1969, surveyor and dam crew stayed.

From Stow news by **Mrs. Gwen Tarbell** in “The Reporter,” July 10, 1969: Work is in progress on the Basin dam site. Some of the men working there are staying at Mildred Watson’s (Vacation Valley Lodge in Stow). We have been up several times to look at the job and it is quite impressive. Mildred Watson is serving smorgasbords again.

Steve Eastman: When the road to the Basin was being cleared, Jim Layne asked me if I'd like to take some wood for firewood. I sawed and piled 4-foot lengths of firewood, but before I got back for them, someone else took them home.

John Chandler: When I visited my grandparents, we rode up to the basin and I was personally in awe of the magnitude of the project and equipment used to undertake it. The large construction vehicles were exactly like those I had only witnessed in miniature in department stores. Curiously, I am pretty certain the dam has shrunken significantly over the last 54 years as it looks puny compared to the vast wonder by which my eight year old self was transfixed that summer.

Norris Hill, from his 1969 diary: “We attended the ASC meeting for the public at the Basin dam site. There were eight speakers, none of whom said much, but each gave their faze (sic) of the project.”

Susie Eastman: “The trees had been cut, but the stumps were left. If you went swimming in the Basin Pond, you'd come out orange. Your towel would be orange too.”

Conway, surveyed the edge of "pond" to determine the acreage that had been cleared, which determined the Johnsons' pay.

In 1969 Millard recorded, **June 10:** went up in Big Basin where they are just starting to work on dam site. Have a big power shovel & dozer there. Have cleared stumps & boulders from an area near dam site & are leveling it to grade. 4 bulldozers are to come on job tomorrow. **June 26:** I went up in Basin watched operations there. Saw a spike horn buck, came out from Royce side above damsite & walked & fed across opening with trucks & dozers & power shovel & back hoe & big pump running on all sides of him. Still people say noise from snow cats & two wheeled vehicles & modern machinery scared wild life away! **July 1:** we went up in Basin to damsite to see what progress they have made. They were hauling much down into old gravel pit below campground. **July 9:** went up where they are putting much from pond site in old CCC pit. **July 11:** went to gravel pit where some men are getting gravel to put on road leading to well to new Basin campground. **July 17:** In eve Anna & I went to dam site. Lots of people going there to look. **Aug 11:** went to celebration at dam site with Walt (Charles) & Walter Sharp. They had a small gathering with speakers who represented the various agencies involved who gave us the data on the dam etc & answered some questions. Interesting. **Oct 19:** I went to dam site in Basin. It is nearing completion. **Nov 4:** raining hard at 10:30 PM. **Nov 14:** still raining **Nov 16:** went to Basin for a look around then to Colton Brook. Basin has no water back of it, but Colton is up to bottom of floor in stand pipe. **Dec 5:** went to Colton Brook dam. A diver has gotten obstruction out of outlet & ice had gone down 8-9 ft. They are there with back hoe & truck & crawler doing some work where there has been erosion. Took some slides there & then to Basin where I took more slides. Wind has blown more than half of cover of hay mulch off area at Basin. **Dec 18:** I went to Basin Dam... Most of mulch has blown off dam & other seeded areas.

Basin culvert installation

Jim Layne used his equipment to create the dam. He dug the trench to put the pipe. He hauled gravel from his pit. He spread sand on top of pipe and loam on top of sand. He also hauled gravel for Colton Dam which was being constructed around the same time.

Machinery used in Basin excavation

Norris Hill's 1969 diary: Oct 20 I went up to the dam and told the boss that we had hay for sale. He said he would tell "Gordon" if he saw him. He is the man who has charge of the seeding. Oct 22 Finley Wilfong called in a.m. and bought six bales of hay for mulch. $3.00 cash.

Frank Eastman's recollections: "Willie" Wilfong was foreman at the Basin. They were paying $4 per hour while the NH DOT, where I worked, was paying $2.59. I asked Willie about working at the Basin for one week. Willie said he would ask the boss on Monday. I was there before 7 AM. Willie came back from talking with boss and said, 'Have you got an acetylene torch? Go get it.' One day I was asked to pick up 1.2 ton of calcium chloride – the road was getting dusty. I spread it after quitting time, as regular guys from Texas were leaving the site.

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The dump trucks were handled roughly by excavator. The excavator would pull them into proper position. I welded tail gates at the State Garage on Butter Hill Road. I charged a load of mud per truck, which I used to build up the lawn on the north side of my house by McDonough Brook. I invited one driver to supper. After eating, the driver asked if he could play a song for Barbara and me. He got his guitar. He was excellent, imitating any popular singer that was requested. He said he left the music career because it wasn't healthy keeping to someone else's hectic schedule. Driving a dump truck was a better pace.

They were pumping water away from the concrete form. I was asked to gas it up during the night. When I got there, it had run out and I couldn't start it. I had to get Willie Wilfong to help start it. The dam was complete, but there was a set date to close the dam. In the meantime, it rained 17 inches, 'pouring pitchforks and broom handles,' resulting in flooding downstream.

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The Other Flood Control Projects

Cold River Dam at AMC - The SCS held a meeting at AMC Cold River Camp (CRC) to discuss a plan to locate a large dam at the CRC pool site. This would involve moving some cabins and messing up 1/3 of the campsites on east end of camp. Protests were firm enough to convince authorities a site several hundred feet upstream might be less disturbing even though it left Charles Brook uncontrolled. The Basin Dam was built and CRC immediately used the pond to teach canoeing fundamentals to beginners. Plans to construct dam above CRC within the next two years were never carried out.
(Reflections by Robert & Emma Crane)

The Basin, drained for repair, in 1980s

Norris Hill's diary August 30, 1969 – We looked at prospective place for dam on **Langdon Brook**. (The dam was never built.)

McDonough Brook Dam was originally planned to be built beside Frank Eastman's house on 113B and create a large recreation area. Several homes on 113B and Butter Hill Road would have had to be moved or destroyed. There were public hearings. The home owners were quite upset. The dam was eventually built in Stow where no houses would be affected. Cheryl Buzzell remembers, “We moved here Oct '72. Spring of '73 there was logging at the site of the dam on McDonough Brook. It silted the water, ruining the fishing. The pond was originally larger. It has settled, with swampy land around it.”

The **Cold River clearing project** was to remove trees, logs, stumps, brush between Deer Hill & Bradley Brook, thus making a better channel. It was determined that this work was not compatible with fishery needs, and besides, state law prohibits bulldozing stream beds.

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A Spring Flood

By Angus P. Andrews

Phil Andrews was our nearest neighbor (about a mile away) when I was a kid on the farm in Stow, Maine, in the 1940s. He related the following story to me when I visited him in July of 1999.

The Cold River rose more than usual in the spring of 1943. All the farm houses along that stretch of Cold River had been built high up on the slopes, well beyond the reach of the flood waters. The problem was that Phil had already put some of his pigs and sheep into the valley bottom-lands that had since been flooded overnight.

My father, Angus I. Andrews, showed up at daybreak with a canoe, and the two of them set out to save all the animals they could find. They found nearly all of Phil's sheep and pigs in one place, gathered together in a tight group with just the tops of their heads sticking above the water. Phil surmised that they had kept moving to higher ground as the water was rising until they were on the top of a small rise with was eventually submerged to the point they were standing on their hind legs to keep their head above water.

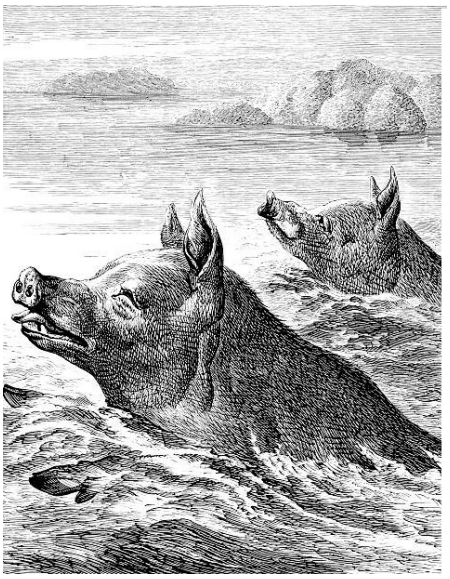


Image by Getty Images

Phil was riding in the bow of the canoe and my father was in the stern. Phil first tried lifting sheep into the canoe by grabbing onto the wool, but soon found it was nearly impossible to lift a wet sheep out of the water after its wool had been soaked through. However, he found that two sheep at a time could be grasped firmly by their wool and held alongside the canoe with their heads above water, one on either side, while my father paddled to high ground with them. All the sheep in the group were rescued this way.

There was no wool on the pigs to grab for that sort of operation, but when they were still fetching the sheep, one of the pigs lost its footing and started swimming. The pig was a strong swimmer and struck out on its own at a pretty good clip, but they were able to catch up with it in the canoe and herd it toward high ground. Eventually, they were able to bring all the pigs out of the water to high ground just by herding them with the canoe.

Upcoming Events

October 12, 1 PM: The Maine Shape Note Singers will be singing at our schoolhouse. This is the traditional "Singing School" of early New England communities. After a brief history of the tradition, the public is welcome to join in the singing. See https:// fasola.org to learn more about the Singers.

Donations

Thank you so much for your generous support!

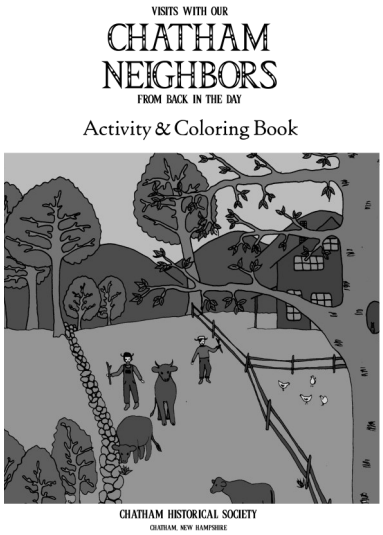
Al and Jacky Stearns: a wooden butter churn; **Lincoln Garland:** a treadle sewing machine; **Alina Eastman:** a laminating machine; **Jackson Historical Society:** a sign with a story from Evans Notch area; **David Crouse:** his new book, *Descendants of James and Margaret (Alexander) McKeen*; **Estate of Elwyn Wheaton:** framed picture of Libby Prison during the Civil War; **Boy Scouts:** a propane griddle; **Leslie Dame:** irons from old sled runners; **Miriam Eastman:** a large display case; **Sheryl Emery:** a tall chair for speakers to use; **Brenna Schneider:** a calendar for the raffle.

Monetary Donations: Stanley & Tammy Ferraez (in memory of Elwyn Wheaton), **Jim Stanford, Jeff & Holly Patch, Gene Chandler, Elaine Caltabiano-Schneider, Steve Murphy, Bill Almey, Rae Eastman, Liz Ahern,** Anonymous. Thank you so much for your generous support! Thanks to all who bought raffle tickets!

Stories from 'Back in the Day'

As Appeared in the Conway Daily Sun

As time marches on and technology speeds up our world, stories and memories of times past can fade rapidly. Jeanne Eastman, president of the Chatham Historical Society, wanted to save some of the stories and memories of the unique town of Chatham and so has put together a collection entitled, Visits with our Chatham Neighbors from Back in the Day.



"I felt that there were just so many interesting stories of the town's history and of its citizens' daily lives that shouldn't be lost," Eastman says.

The 30-page booklet is dedicated to Barbara Eastman, who passed away in 2023 but left a legacy of community service through organizing and running the Chatham Library and, subsequently, the Chatham Historical Society. It was also inspired in part by Jeanne Eastman's five-year-old grandson, who refers to the stories his grandparents tell him as they take him to Chatham's old cellar holes and stonewalls and hiking to old mines as "back in the day."

With contributions from 15 different residents, some still living, others from diaries or remembered by relatives, the booklet provides an entertaining look at times mostly long gone—definitely simpler, but also sometimes much harder. The accompanying artwork to enhance the stories is provided by local residents, both adults and children.

Visits with our Chatham Neighbors is available for $10 at the Chatham Historical Society, which is located at the Chatham former one-room school house in Center Chatham and is open from 9 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. The booklet can also be ordered by calling (603) 694-3388 or by emailing chathamnhhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Chatham Historical Society
1061 Main Road
Chatham, NH 03813

Dues and Donations

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