

An Oral Interview With Mr. Sumner Smith, Concerning the Past
Land Uses of The Sandy Pond Area.

Conducted by Jo Springer,
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JES: Could you please tell me how your family came to acquire the Sandy Pond area?

SS: Well, they came here in the 1780's. They first came to America in 1636 and first settled in Watertown. Then they had a farm near Piney Corner in Waltham. Then in the 1780's, they bought the farm in Lincoln, 135 acres at first, and we've been here ever since.

JES: What portion of Lincoln did they first move to?

SS: Well, on the west shores of Sandy Pond and the land extended to Baker Bridge Road.

JES: How far north did that go?

SS: Well that is hard to define, it's just in the woods you see. There are no prominent demarcations.

JES: Would it have been south of Route Two?

SS: Yes, in fact I bought about 100 acres south of Route Two. I owned most of the area from Sandy Pond Road to Route Two. I don't own it now, it is conservation land now.

JES: Do you know how far west this was?

SS: It went to the Higginson Estate, now the Adams. Part of it is owned by various people.

JES: Could you tell me how the land was passed down through the family?

SS: They bought it from the Dakin's. Zachariah Smith bought

SS: it. It was passed down through the family through probate, from father to son.

JES: Could you please tell me about the land use on the farm and what parcels were used for what purposes?

SS: About 75 acres were for crops; apples, vegetables, mostly corn. We had a 40 cow dairy, so we had to raise food for the dairy and four horses.

JES: What portion of the farm was used for which crops?

SS: Well the first place, at the fork in the road there, the house was on the right hand side as you go towards Concord, and between the two houses on the street there was a 96 foot barn, a really big old fashioned barn. They pulled it down about 20 years ago, because they didn't need it any more. It was in very bad shape. But they owned the land in front of the house, in front of the barn all the way down including the Smith school, all that land there, between the stone-walls. That was a very productive part of the farm right there. Then as you go up Sandy Pond Road then beyond the pumping station beyond the bend there, there is a big field on the left, a lot of it has grown up to bushes and things now. The going opposite the pumping station on the hill, that was all apple orchard, and the other part, I just described was mostly apple orchards. There was that piece between the pond and Sandy Pond Road, you know that hill there, we had an asparagus bed in there and hay and we often had corn there, potatoes, tomatoes and various crops, but that was all good producing land. We always had about an acre of strawberries.

JES: When did you stop farming the land?

SS: I stopped in 1937, that was the finish.

JES: Did you let the land return to forest and bushes at that time?

SS: Well, people cut hay on it after that, at least on the better parts of it. They cut hay now, it keeps the mustard out of it, but some of it, the part that was orchards is pretty rough stuff, we just let that grow.

JES: Did you press your own cider?

ss: Yes, we have an old antique cider mill down in the cellar. We had a keg of cider every winter.

JES: Where did you sell most of your crops?

SS: To the Boston markets. My grandfather use to sell vinegar. He had a lot of casks in the loft in the barn where he made vinegar. It was so strong you could almost walk on it. It had to be diluted quite a bit to use it.

JES: Was part of the land used for woodlot?

SS: Oh, there was a lot of woodlot, yes, mostly chestnut and pine.

JES: To whom did you sell the lumber?

SS: Locally, if we had any surplus the sawmill man would sell it. We had to haul the logs to West Concord, to Barrett's mill on Barrett's mill road. They were always using new lumber around the barn, because there is a great deal of moisture, and animals around, and the cows wear out the floor, they scratch everything and every few years you had to renew a

ES: lot of the floor. So we always kept some lumber in stock for those purposes. We used a lot of it for fence posts and railroad ties, and telephone poles.

JES: Do you know of any sawmill sites on your land?

SS: There was one down on Tower Road, Harrington's sawmill. That was the only sawmill that I knew around here.

There was one in North Lincoln on Hobbs Brook. I had a receipt in my grandfather's papers, from Harrington, for sawing lumber for him. I sent it to Dr. Harrington just for old time's sake.

JES: Have you ever found any old Indian remains on the land?

SS: No, I've never found any. They are not prolific in this part of the town. I don't think they exist here. I've dug for them while gardening around the place, and strawberry beds require that you use your hands a lot, and all over the place I've searched, the island in Sandy Pond and I've never found any. I'm pretty good at seeing things too, because I've seen wildflowers that nobody else ever found walking the woods. My mother found one that might have been an arrowhead, but it wasn't certain. The Indians followed the river through Concord and there are plenty of artifacts around Concord, but I've never heard of anything that amounted to too much in Lincoln. I think the Winchells found a few over near their pond, but they are very scarce in this society.

JES: Have you ever seen any remains of Stearns Wheeler's cabin on the east side of the Pond?

ss: No. I had a cabin on the pond, there are the remains of

SS: that there, the chimney and the fireplace, that is all.
I don't know of any other.

JES: When did you build your cabin?

SS: I built that about in the early 1930's, because I remember the children's ages at that time. Have you seen the chimney up there? It is too bad it burned down. It was a cute little cabin. We had a lot of fun there when the children were small. We also use to have a lot of friends there. Our contemporaries use to join us there in the summer time. We would have a corn picnic or something, we had a great time up there. You see, how I built it, there were old dead chestnut trees still standing after the 1920's and we used those for the cabin. That was a chestnut grove all across the end of the pond there. There was a Swedish fellow in Concord that bought standing woodlots, and he bought all that, We put two Frenchmen down there in the shack to cut the wood, and they cut telephone poles and posts, and railroad ties, and cordwood and ~~everything that was~~ saleable. When they finished, there were some pieces left over and the Frenchmen were good workers so I asked them if they would like to build a cabin for me. They said sure, you get somebody to cut the logs where they are and get a horse to haul them to the cabin site and we'll build you a cabin and so they did. There was another fellow who was a great crank on particular stones, you know water cut stones. I had these water cut stones that I kept around the barn, so I took those down there and if you examine that chimney, it's got some great stones in it, many odd and funny stones. But it got abused by the scours.

SS: The scouts used it to get advanced degrees. One morning, one of the neighbors called me and said your cabin is on fire. Later that day I went over there and there was a man scratching around in the ashes. I asked him what he was looking for. He said, "My son was out last night and he hasn't come back yet". So he thought he was in the ashes. He probably used the cabin to sleep in.

JES: Do you know anything about the remains of a cabin down near the lower parking lot of the DeCordova museum and the pond?

SS: Dr. Macomber built that. That was a commercially built cabin that you buy and assemble, if that is the one you mean. That is the only one that I know of over there. All that is left is the ruins. He did not have very good luck with that. The roughnecks use to break into it and smash it up and finally ruined it. Dr. Macomber was a doctor in Boston, and had quite a large family, and he owned all of that land. O'Sullivan came in after that, and they finished it up when O'Sullivan lived there.

JES: Do you know when Dr. Macomber built the cabin?

SS: No I don't, probably around the 1920' or 1930's. I'd say around the 1930's.

JES: Could you tell me about the town of Lincoln's use of the Sandy pond water?

SS: The system started in 1870. Before, people got their water from wells. Everybody had at least one well. We had

SS: three down at the farm. One for the house, one for the cows and one extra one. There was no commercial ice around here and no ice men. We use to cool the milk by lowering it into the water of the well on long chains. We would keep the butter and the meat and everything that was perishable in a bucket and then lower it down the well. Every once in a while the chain would give way and you would get it out with a long pole with a hook on it.

JES: How deep were your wells?

SS: Oh, they varied from ten to fifteen feet to twenty to thirty feet according to where they struck water. They were dug by hand and lined with stones. They weren't very large in diameter, so you could kind of crawl down there and put your feet on the stones. It was better to go down on a ladder, but you could go down on the stones. I don't think that I ever crawled down there, but I saw my father crawl down once.

JES: Did your chestnut trees bear enough fruit so that you could sell the surplus?

SS: Yes, we use to eat a lot, and I use to collect them. There were some huge chestnut trees down on the shore of the pond, and in the cow pastures, the grass was short there all the time. The cows ate the grass, so we would pick up many chestnuts there. We also picked up many, up where the cabin was, and there were big trees up there, with very large chestnuts. I tried to pick a bushel of chestnuts every fall. You know that there are thirty-two quarts in a bushel? Well, I wouldn't always get a bushel, but I'd get a good amount. We would take them to market with the produce and sell them to somebody and get a few bucks, that is all. In the winter we would roast them,

SS: boil them and eat them raw. They got very sweet when they aged. They would shrink some and get hard, but they seemed to acquire a sweetness with age. I missed them when they all died.

JES: Who put in the fifty foot granite markers around Sandy Pond?

SS: The town put those around the pond in the early 1890's. Some of the abutters kept their rights. It didn't amount to much. I don't know if it was ever exercised. They (the abutters), have enough other protective rights now I don't believe they need them anymore. Anyways it was never formally used.

JES: Could you explain the pumping system that was installed in Sandy Pond around the 1870's?

SS: They put in an ordinary pipe at first and then in the 1900's they put in what they called a new feed pipe to the reservoir. We organized it pretty well about 1900. They put in the gate house. They didn't have a gatehouse before. The pipes just came into the pumping station and the water went through the pump to the reservoir. They put in a modern pump and a modern system with a twelve inch main to the reservoir which they didn't have before. It really made quite a good system then.

JES: Do you know when the town of Concord had rights to the water supply?

SS: They had an active legislature in 1888. (1872?). Both towns had representatives in the legislature in Boston and the Concord fellows wanted to keep Lincoln out of it. They wanted first rights to the water even though none of the pond is in

S.S. Concord. They had it all prepared to vote on it the next day, I heard, to give Lincoln second rights. I had an uncle over here that lived in the brick house, an old astute Yankee named Samuel Pierce and he was in the legislature. He must have put in a lot of work that night, because the next day when they went to vote to give it to Concord they gave Lincoln the first rights and Concord second rights. When the water got scarce, Concord had to cut down and when the water got to a certain point, Concord had to stop all together. Finally, it did get so bad that Concord was using mostly well water. They had enough well water and the water from Nagog Pond, so they voluntarily pulled out of Sandy Pond about fifteen or twenty years ago.

In my teens I use to fish there during all my spare time and the one good fishing spot was at the end of Concord's intake they called it. It might be 100 feet from the shore, at the end of the pipe there. There was no screen, just an open pipe. The water would get so low there that I could put my paddle up across the end of the pipe and the water would hold it right there with suction. There would be a little eddy. They had to lower the pipe and put in a donkey engine to pump it to Concord. They had to get it high enough at the gatehouse so that it would run to Concord. The high water mark in the pond was suppose to be 100 feet higher than the land at Richardson's drug store corner. What a cheap operation they had. It ran right from Sandy Pond by gravity to the Concord reservoir. No wonder they wanted it, it was a great situation for them. We had to pump it over the hill here.

JES: I understand that some of the water from Sandy Pond was used to run a sawmill at Concord. Could you tell me about this?

SS: I don't know anything about that. The sawmill that we went to up there had its own water system. It had a pond with a dam and a sluice way. They let the water out when they ~~want~~ wanted to run the wheel and when they weren't running the mill, and the water was short, they dammed it and raised the elevation. This was a natural pond up at Barrett's mill with a brook and all.

JES: What was the impact of the hurricane of 1938 on the Sandy Pond area?

SS: It had no appreciable impact. It knocked down trees quite away from the pond, but I don't think that anything blew into the pond or ^{was} disturbed around the shore particularly. Maybe one quarter of a mile away, north of the pond, you go up a hill there, there was a whole place of pines, you could see them from the pumping station, a whole row of tall pines there, those all blew down. I owned that at the time. We cut them all down and took them to the sawmill, but that did not affect the pond any.

JES: Do you feel that the hurricane knocked out the trees indiscriminately?

SS: Yes, indiscriminately, because the Storrow estate had a lot of land and many trees, and Mrs. Storrow told me she did not lose a pine tree. We practically lost all ours on this side.

JES: Is part of her land down in a valley?

SS: No, hurricanes are freakish like tornados. They hit harder in one place than in another.

JES: Could you tell me something about the dance hall that was on the pond?

SS: That was part of the Lincoln Boat Club. Lincoln Boat Club was operating around 1890. They had quite a good sized boathouse down there and a dance hall upstairs. They had dances there, and it was decorated with strings of Japanese lanterns. They also had a piano.

JES: What types of fish could you catch in the pond?

SS: Bass, pickerel, perch and eels were common.

JES: Did you eat the eels?

SS: No, I never did, some people did. I didn't try to catch the eels. I use to fish there all my spare time and I could tell you the depths of the water almost anywhere in the pond. I anchored boats all over the pond.

JES: How deep is it in the deepest part?

SS: About thirtyfive feet, it use to be. It is a comparatively shallow pond. When you have a dry spell you can walk about 200-300 feet over dry sand on the north shore. It goes out very gradually.

JES: I read your description of ice cutting on Sandy Pond in Mrs. Little's Environmental Studies Report.

SS: Yes, I use to help cut ice. She really researched that well.

JES: Did your family cut ice on the pond for their own personal consumption before it was cut commercially?

SS: No, we never cut ice. The icehouse was on our land and so we had a deal to get free ice. The ice house burned down and the ice man built another one entirely out of chestnut wood

SS: even the shingles.

JES: Did you have fresh meadow hay on the farm?

SS: Yes. We had a couple of meadows on the farm at home, (what we called home down here) and then we had what they called a long meadow. That was just almost over to the railroad near the Davis house, the two houses in there just this side of the Codman pasture and the meadow went way back there. They cut most of that by a mowing machine, when it wasn't too wet a season. Todd's Pond was another meadow. There wasn't any pond there then. That meadow was so wet they had to cut it all entirely by hand scythe. I had an occasion to give that land to Mr. Todd and then he sold it to Baldwin. Baldwin developed the whole place and built the pond. Before that, one of the Todd boys built a small dam and pond there for skating. Baldwin just enlarged it. Baldwin bought that around 1960.

JES: What was the process of selling your land to the town?

SS: Well, if I did not sell it, they would take it by eminent domain. They would have taken it anyways, so we decided instead we would go through a friendly process. I did not want to sell any of it, but I practically had to do it. I had quite a lot left.

JES: As you were growing up did you work on the farm much?

SS: I sure did. I did everything on the farm. I was up at five o'clock for a long time, and if the five men did not wake up at five o'clock I woke them up. I milked the cows, drove to market, sold the goods, and was as active as could be.

JES: You drove all the way to Boston to sell your produce?

SS: Yes, in a horse and wagon. It took about five hours to go

SS: in and about four hours to come back. Once I wanted to put more furniture in my room, I was single at the time, and they use to have furniture auctions in a place on Bromfield St., so I went in there one day and saw a bureau and a bookcase. I bought them at the auction and to get them home was another problem. So I washed up a load of turnips and took the horse and wagon and the load of turnips to market and I drove down to Bromfield St. I picked up the furniture and brought it home. Wasn't that neat? It took a lot of time, but you weren't use to anything else but taking time in those days. There were no short cuts and no quick ways of getting around, a horse was the only way. Somebody might think I was crazy to do that now, but it was very practical then.

JES: Where in Boston did you take your crops?

SS: Quincy, market, they use to call it the Agricultural Wharehouse and that is where we took our crops. South market St. was at the right where it is all cobblestones now, that was all open then. All the stalls in the Quincy market were all rented by people in the business of handling the produce like meat, poultry, fruit, cheese, all that was wholesale. In the old days we didn't depend on them. You would find a place to park your vehicle and there would be a stable boy to take your horse to the stable to let it rest and feed him. You would sell your goods, and when you were finished the stable boy would bring your horse back and you would drive home.

JES: How often would you take your crops to market?

SS: In the season we would go to market three time a week.

The wagon held eighty-eight bushels and was pulled by two horses.

SS: Then when trucks came in, we had a truck., I tried to sell 3,000 bushels of corn every year, and that wasn't too much either.

JES: Did you have quite a bit of asparagus?

SS: We use to have about an acre and a half of asparagus.

We had an acre bed of asparagus up in that piece that slopes toward the pond, ^{North side?} between the pond and the highway. I use to have to go up there at five o'clock in the morning to cut that asparagus and bring it home, bunch it and get it ready to ship it to market. We had about an acre of strawberries. When the strawberries were over, around the fourth of July, it would be time to cut the hay, according to the weather.

JES: Do you know if there were any whiskey stills built around Sandy Pond during Prohibition?

SS: I don't know of any that were built, but I took a long walk one Sunday morning, and I walked from here up to Crosby's Corner all through the woods. When I started to walk back towards Sandy Pond I saw a structure being fresh built. Well, I got out of there pretty fast. I didn't know who was around there. The chief of police was a great friend of mine and as soon as I saw him I told him of what I had seen up there. He said, "For Christ's sake, did you see that too?" He found it and he thought they got wind of it and stopped building. He use to have offers from various bootleggers to do something like that. He was honest. He wouldn't sell the town out. I'm sure there were places in town where they did do a little of that, probably in old sheds or something. I think he caught a few of them doing that, but there was never any great

SS: quantity of moonshine liquor being made here. Some people use to make their own beer and own liquor too. The fellow that built the chimney over at the cabin was a Dane. He lived over by Baker Bridge and he made some beer that was almost black.

JES: I believe that those are most of the questions that I wanted to ask. Can you think of anything else about the land use that might be interesting?

SS: No, we didn't do anything particular or peculiar. We had a good farm. To run a farm you have to have income all the time for expenses to buy grain for the cattle, to pay for taxes and upkeep and everything. Our farm had something coming in about all the time; milk all the time. We had pears, quinces, apples, peaches, strawberries, asparagus and wood. It was a very valuable farm. A lot of farms did not have any woodlot that ever amounted to anything.

JES: Where did you graze your cows?

SS: A dry cow is a cow that is not giving any milk, waiting to calve again, what they call freshen, give milk again, so every spring, all the dairy farmers around here would form a drove of their dry cattle and walk them up to New Hampshire. Our pasture was about seventy miles from here. A drover would drive them all together and then split them off in various pastures. How they knew each other's cows I don't know, but we use to brand them on the horns, put a hot iron on it. Some of them did not have horns, sometimes the horns would get smashed in the summer, but that's where all the dry cows went all summer, until they were going to calve again. The state

SS: regulations became so strict and so cumbersome that my father gave up going to New Hampshire and bought a pasture in Bolton. When you ship animals over the state line you get all these inspections and stamps and it was too much. So we bought a pasture in Bolton, which is only about fifteen miles away. We walked up there for awhile until we had trucks and then we would truck them up.

JES: Did your family ever own the pond itself?

SS: No. It was a great pond, the state owned it, you couldn't own it.

JES: I read that you use to sell worms to the fisherman.

SS: Yes, worms and grasshoppers and frogs I sold.

JES: Was the pond very crowded on weekends?

SS: I've seen fifteen boats out there on a Saturday afternoon. Yes, it was used a lot for outside fisherman, besides the native fisherman. It was fished quite a bit.

JES: Thank you very much for spending your time with me, you have been very helpful to me.

SS: Well you are welcome. It was a good day for this, because it is too wet outside to do any gardening.