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## Richard Turcotte Collection

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# FROM THE COLLECTIONS

## Richard Turcotte Collection

**P**INELAND Center was opened in 1908 as the School for the Feeble-Minded to care for, and provide a home for Maine's developmentally disabled population. Located in Pownal, Pineland was a self-contained community with dormitories, a hospital, store, pool, religious services, and a farming operation, and at the height of its use, it was home to 1,500 people. Controversies over finances and resident care plagued the institution throughout its history. Class-action suits in the 1970s led to a gradual change in how Maine cared for citizens with cognitive disabilities, and this eventually led to the closing of Pineland in 1996.

A recent gift to Maine Historical Society underscores how little we know about life in Maine's medical and long-term care institutions. The donation was small, but it gives us a glimpse at one man's life at Pineland. Richard Turcotte was born in 1914 and lost his mother at age three. Orphaned completely at age eleven, Turcotte went to live with a neighboring family in his hometown of Lewiston. When that family was unable to care for him, he was sent to Pineland. He spent the next twenty-five years there.

This new collection came to Maine Historical Society upon Mr. Turcotte's death in spring 2001 and consists of a lovingly compiled photo album and an armband and certificate for his service in the Aircraft Warning Service during WWII. The album has pages of black-and-white snapshots of the residents, staff, and buildings at Pineland, and most are labeled with plastic label-gun tape. Thirty-three pages of meticulously cared for and well-labeled photographs chronicle trips to Bradbury Mountain State Park. One photo shows a group of musicians dressed for a parade, while another shows boys setting up a tent while on a camping trip. Another photo, labeled Fr. Flanagan, R. Liberty and R. Turcotte, looks like a shot from the movie, *Boys' Town*. And a photo of a female staff member cooking is a nice view of staff duties at Pineland. None of the images are dated, but they look to be—judging from the clothing and vehicles—from the 1930s and 1940s. There are eight additional images inserted at the end of the album that seem to be from a later period, possibly the 1950s, and they include a wonderful image of a young boy and a nurse in the infirmary. This could be Camp Tall Pines in Poland,



*E. Donston with Richard Turcotte*



*Maybelle Finley, Pineland staff*



*Father Flanagan, R. liberty, Richard Turcotte*



*Unidentified, maybe at  
Camp tall pines*

once used as a summer camp for the boys and girls of Pineland and now owned by the YWCA.

The photos show a side of Pineland we seldom think about—people in their daily life and having fun. The images of friends and staff are carefully labeled with press-on tape strips. Even the photos of Richard Turcotte are labeled, so it may be that someone made the album for him—perhaps when he left Pineland in 1950. Obviously a lot of care went into assembling the album, and it was kept in pristine condition over the years. It was among his possessions when he died in May at the Auburn Nursing Home. The staff there donated the collection to MHS. Mr. Turcotte lived and worked in Lewiston after he left Pineland. He never married and left behind no close relatives, so it is unlikely that we'll learn much more about him, but the album opens the possibility (and highlights a great need) for research into life at Maine's medical institutions.

*Stephanie Philbrick*



*B. Hardy and Richard Turcotte*

*Unidentified musicians*