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832,000 Acres: Maine's 1825 Fire and Its Piscataquis Logging Aftermath, Chapter 3

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# 832,000 acres - Maine’s 1825 Fire & Its Piscataquis Logging Aftermath

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Chapter 3: Sebec River, Sebec Lake and tributaries

The drainage

Sebec River, Sebec Lake, and their tributaries cover parts of 14 townships surrounding an east-west axis, Mother Nature’s forearm and hand reaching west with fingers spread. The river is the forearm, the lake is the palm of her hand, and her fingers are the main tributaries. The 1825 fire burned her forearm, her palm, and lower parts of her fingers.

Sebec River (9 miles long) flows into the Piscataquis River 23 miles from its mouth on the Penobscot River. The first waterpower source on the river is at mile two, Milo village, and its second is at Sebec Village at the foot of Sebec Lake (12 miles long). Sebec Lake had four key access points: Sebec village at the east end, Bowerbank village on the north shore at about the mid-point, Blethen Landing (Greeley) on the south shore nearly opposite Bowerbank village and 5 miles due north of Foxcroft village, and Packard landing at the head of the lake, 14 miles from Abbot village to its west.

Two primary streams enter at the western end of the lake. Ship Pond Stream’s mouth is at the northwest corner and Big Wilson Stream is south of that at Packard landing. Ship Pond Stream (5.4 miles long) drains Lake Onawa, that receives water via Long Pond Stream (8 miles long) from Long Pond. Vaughn Brook drains into Long Pond Stream. The only community that developed along this waterway was Onawa station, above the southeast corner of Lake Onawa in 1889. Big Wilson Stream (18.5 miles long) flows from the Lower and Upper Wilson ponds 3 miles east of Greenville village. This stream’s major tributaries are Little Wilson Stream (8.5 miles long), whose headwaters are a mile east of Upper Shirley Corner, and Davis Brook, that flows from First Davis Pond, where North Guilford village formed around its outlet 6.6 miles from Big Wilson Stream. Willimantic village was 5 miles upstream from Packard landing. The mill village associated with the Willimantic Thread Company mill (1879–1902) was on Big Wilson Stream, a mile above Packard landing at lower Greeley Falls.

Logging activity along Sebec River

The Chadwick report provided the available information on the nature of the woods the early settlers found as they moved up river to form Milo village at the first waterpower site, and then Sebec village at the outlet of Sebec Lake. Good white pine (pine), the only tree logged until the 1850s, was evident in the landscape. Whatever had not been cut earlier was probably largely lost to the 1825 fire. The fire did leave scattered small pockets of sawmill-worthy pine and spruce, but the volume did not attract the attention of lumbermen from the large Bangor mills. Farmers owned the land along the river. These lot owners probably did some cutting from their wood lots and sold it to local mills that cut for the surrounding community. The one discovered example was that in 1889 or 1890 Babson and North, who had land with spruce and pine, cut and landed their logs on the river.1 By 1880 any birch and poplar that grew into the 1825 burn areas and were left untouched by farmers had value.

The village dams at Milo and Sebec were each in place after the first residents built their farms and cleared land, and the settlers soon had mills for grain and lumber. At Sebec village Samuel Kimball, Mark Trafton, and others built the first dam and sawmill in 1804. What became of the mill is unknown, but in 1821 Robert Morrison and Son (Jr.) built a lumber mill and drove their pine logs, which they cut from around the lake. They sold in 1830 to Benjamin P. and John H. Gilman, who made rafts of milled lumber that they floated to Bangor. The duration of this business and practice is unknown.2

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1 William R. Sawtell, Old Sebec, Volume 1 (Old Town, ME: Howland’s Printing, 1999)
2 Shirley Nason Wright, History of Sebec Maine 1812–1987 (Pr-
In 1866 the Sebec Dam Company received a legislative charter to own the Sebec Lake dam and raise the dam's head, so loggers had sufficient water to drive the current log volume. The head in 1868 was 6 feet with another 4 feet possible. Someone rebuilt the dam in 1871 with multiple sluiceways for logs and constructed a new sawmill, completed about June 1. Thirty years later in 1895–1896 a new Sebec Lake Dam Company, as chartered by the Maine state legislature, purchased the old dam, and built a new stone dam with a sluice for the passage of logs. The dam’s head increased again in 1900. In 1903 the company had permission to lower the water and repair the dam. Six years later in 1909 the legislature amended the charter that now enabled the company to build a new dam of either stone or cement above the old dam; the new dam could be a foot higher than the bottom of the floodgates of the old dam. The dam’s charter did not include electrical generation; the impounded water was for manufacturing. None of the charters’ amendments included rights for other river improvements in support of log driving; these typically appeared in dam charters. The cement dam washed out in 1922 and a work crew soon replaced it.

Sebec village was an important junction of road and waterway. The river was a supply route for those working and living around the lake. For the log drives coming down the lake, it was a key rendezvous point before sluicing the logs into the river for their journey to the Piscataquis River. Between the early 1840s, when Katahdin Iron Works (KIW) opened, and 1883 when the railroad reached there, the teamsters, who hauled the limestone in and the iron piglets out, passed through the village and inflated the activity. The lack of sustained community growth after 1869 was a consequence of the lack of the railroad’s presence; the owners routed it through Milo and South Sebec villages.

Sebec village had locally owned grist, lumber, excelsior, and woolen mills. From the mid-1870s through about 1901 a box shook mill operated. In the late 1880s and early 1900s four sawmills were on the banks of the lake in the village, but they were gone by the mid-1930s. The village had a toothpick mill in at least 1884. By 1890 six mills lined the river at the dam: A.H. Morrison planing,
box shook, and grist mill; Hall, Stetson and Company tanners of sheepskin; Hartwell and Lovejoy, coffins and caskets; Lamson and Rankin, boards and shingles; and the F.M. Ford sawmill. The Ernest Ladd Mill operated just west of the village on the west side of the causeway near the lakeshore during WWII.

Down river Milo village's development was similar to that of Sebec's, until the advent of the railroad in 1869. The town's first saw and grist mill opened in 1823, when a crew built the dam with a 9-foot head at the top of Trafton Fall's, a 14-foot drop. Mark Trafton was a Sebec village sawmill owner who drove his raft of milled lumber over the falls prior to the dam and survived a plunge into the river. In 1842 a crew for the woolen mill dug a canal from the west side of the dam's impoundment parallel to the Sebec River, reentering it below the falls. The dam probably underwent some adjustments in 1845, when the Milo Manufacturing Company took over the dam with a charter from the legislature.

Milo village was on the lumbermen's major supply route from Bangor and Old Town north to the rich and extensive timberlands of the West Branch of the Penobscot River watershed. The teamsters' route opened in the early 1830s. After the railroad reached Milo village in 1869, it was the supply depot for those same teamsters until 1882, when the tracks continued north to Brownville and it became the depot.

By the early 1880s some of the birch, poplar, and ash that grew in the burn of the 1825 fire were mature enough for spools, excelsior, and handle stock. Milo village's close proximity to the wood source and a railroad line that could ship the product that did not float made it a prime location for mills. A Milo village ash shovel-handle mill, which was operating as early as 1863, was now, 20 years later, turning out 96,000 shovel handles at the C.S. Johnson mill. Prior to the train teamsters hauled some of the ash for the handles from the southeast quadrant of T4R9 N.W.P. Jeremiah Fenno and Sons opened a birch mill in 1878 on the canal. Four years later Parker and Bailey owned the mill. They also added 10 highly efficient excelsior machines that Bailey designed and built; they sold identical machines to other mills. The duo sold in 1889 to T.J. Stewart and Company that after two years sold to Milo Mills Company and two years later Boston Excelsior and Spool Stock Company took over. In 1897 the company built a new mill, a 45 by 150-foot structure housing 50 excelsior machines. The company employed 30 men and used 15,000 cords of poplar per year. The excelsior mill went dormant about 1906, but reopened in March 1907. In 1902 American Thread Company (ATCo) opened a spool mill or perhaps bought the spool mill portion of the Boston mill complex. Eventually this mill also cut long and short lumber. When the Milo Lumber Company first opened is unknown, but it operated in 1907, and about 1912 the owners closed the mill and moved the machinery to Raytown. Tired of dealing with low summer water, Boston Excelsior made it possible for its machines to run on steam power beginning the summer of 1911. Twenty years later (c.1931) Boston Excelsior closed, but ATCo continued operations until 1975.

The railroad connecting Milo and KIW villages was long awaited by many loggers and mills. In 1883 J.A. Gifford cut 50,000 board feet of ash in the KIW village area and shipped it via the new rail line to the Milo mill. A year later the Parker and Bailey mill in Milo village was also using the rail line to bring in its cut from KIW village. In 1886 their crew cut birch below the Gulf, and hauled to the KIW village train stop for shipment to their mill. Horse teams still hauled the logs from Medford and Orneville townships, and from the shores of Schoodic Lake.

Many of these same companies also relied on log drives; poplar for the excelsior mill floated, as did the pine used by all the mills for making wooden shipping boxes. Boston Excelsior, Milo Lumber, and ATCo main-

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8 Elsie Watters conversation and The Maine Register, State Yearbook and Legislative Manual, 1890
9 Amasa Loring, History of Piscataquis County, Maine: From its Earliest Settlement to 1880 (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
10 Prentiss Papers, journal with Prentiss exploration of the SE ¼ of T4R9 N.W.P.; available at University of Maine Raymond Fogler Library Special Collections
11 The Piscataquis Observer, April 10, 1884 and The Maine Mining Journal, February 23, 1883
12 The Piscataquis Observer, March 13, 1884
13 The Piscataquis Observer, April 1, 1897
14 The Industrial Journal, March 1907
15 R. Michael White, A Brief Historical Sketch of Ray's Mill, person-alpages.tds.net/~lpwhite/Raytown.html
16 The Piscataquis Observer, March 30, 1911
17 The Maine Mining Journal, April 20, 1883
18 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, October 14, 1886
19 The Maine Mining and Industrial Journal, February 29, 1884
tained booms in the Sebec River. A legislative act in 1903 gave Boston Excelsior the right to have piers and booms to hold logs in the Sebec River, as long as they did not impede normal river traffic. Four years later the legislature extended the same rights to Milo Lumber Company and ATCo with the stipulation that the companies, including Boston Excelsior, maintain an open channel 30 feet wide, with the middle being the current’s centerline. These mills spread from the dam up the west side of the impoundment, with their booms connected to the west shore and the open channel on the east side.

The lumbermen, whose drives came through the Sebec and Milo villages, typically operated independently and cooperatively, like they did on the Piscataquis River. In contrast to lumbermen on the Penobscot River and its East and West Branches, those who cut the lands draining to Sebec Lake never formed a log-driving company that owned dams, boom houses, pilings, cribs, side dams, headworks, towboats, bateaux, strings of boom logs, boom chains, and all the other infrastructure and equipment typically used during a drive. Farther up the watershed some lumbermen teamed together to build some dams and make stream improvement, but they did not constitute a driving organization. When towboats became available to tow booms of logs on Sebec Lake, each lumberman made his own contact with a boat owner.

Whether or not lumbermen made Sebec River improvements to enhance the flow of logs is speculative. Between the dams of Sebec and Milo villages, the main river course is unobstructed smooth-flowing water with many pond-like sections that would have been likely places for logs to drift out of the main current. These areas seem to have no evidence of rock crib piers between which boom logs would have been strung to keep logs in the main current; perhaps a shear boom was sufficient or maybe men in bateaux patrolled these areas. The current was sufficient to carry the logs to the dam at Milo village. Drivers placed a boom in front of the dam to keep the pressure of the logs off the dam and one at the back of the logs in the impoundment, so the wind would not blow them back up river. Below Milo village the river has tranquil current, especially after passing the sharp east turn not far below the dam.

The drive boss had a camp near the Sebec village dam, where he collected his logs before sluicing them into the river. Some old pictures show a tent sluicing near the outlet of the dam. The next log collection point was 7 miles down stream behind the Milo dam, the last stop before entering the Piscataquis River. The drive crew held their logs at Milo village until any drive on the Piscataquis River had cleared. Most of the men not sluicing at the dam were in bateaux that were assigned sections of the river to keep the logs moving. Once the last log was through the sluice, the sluicing crew joined in picking the rear.

The last drive down the river was probably a St. Regis Paper Company pulpwood drive in the mid-1940s.

Logging activity around Sebec Lake

Loggers cutting around the shores of the lake prior to the 1825 fire landed the trees on the shores of the lake. After the 1825 fire, what little remained around the lake edges loggers probably soon cut. Between 1826 and the mid-1870s most loggers passed through the lake to cut in and drive from unburned areas to the north and west. River drivers drove logs into Sebec Lake at Bear Cove on Bear Brook, Newell Cove on Mill Brook, Bucks Cove from Ship Pond Stream, and a broad unnamed cove at the mouth of Big Wilson Stream. Initially river drivers rafted the floating logs and towed them by headworks down the lake to the outlet at Sebec village, where they released them into the river. When steamboats began to ply the lake in the mid-1860s, they took up most of the towing. By the late 1870s loggers began to harvest in the burn around the lake and on the lower portion of its tributaries. Birch, poplar, and pine were the three predominant species that eventually grew up in the burn areas. Teamsters initially hauled the birch, which does not float, to mills at lower Greeley Falls, Blethen Landing, and Foxcroft village, and in later years to Milo village.

Logging predominated on the south shore west of Blethen Landing, around the west end of the lake, and down the full length of the lake’s north side. What logging took place along the 6 miles of the south edge of the lake east of Blethen Landing remains undiscovered. Mills in support of the loggers developed at Blethen Landing, lower Greeley Falls (Willimantic Thread Company), Mill

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20 Daily Kennebec Journal, February 9, 1907
21 Acts and Resolves and Special Laws of the State of Maine passed by the Legislature of the state of Maine
22 Old pictures courtesy of Milo Historical Society
Stream in Bowerbank village, the junction of the road and Bear Brook in Barnard township, and Sebec village. Access to the south side of the lake was via a road from Dover and Foxcroft villages to Blethen Landing and one from South Sebec village to Sebec village. The road to the lake’s west end came from Upper Abbot village. Loggers accessed areas north of the lake on a road paralleling the north shore from Sebec village to Bowerbank village. The lake’s major log landings were at Bennett Brook, Bucks Cove, the mouth of Big Wilson Stream, Miller Brook, and Sebec village. Train service never reached the lake.

At the east end of the lake on the north side, the 1825 fire burned only the southern portion of Barnard township; its southern boundary is less than a mile north of Sebec Lake. The early settlers had a saw and grist mill on the West Branch of Bear Brook. On the East Branch of Bear Brook the Walling map of 1858 placed a sawmill on the stream below the road, now known as Northwest Ridge Road, and a shingle and clapboard mill on the north side of the road, 4.22 miles from Sebec Lake. In 1867 the township still had a saw and shingle mill on the East branch of Bear Brook and three other undeveloped mill sites. In spring 1878 Fred M. Strout, owner of the old mill Joseph Lamson and Sons built on Bear Brook, hauled milled lumber across the lake and down to the train at Sebec Station (South Sebec). Their mill was between the lake and the road crossing; its water wheel was still visible in the 1940s. The 1882 Colby map had a Williams and Egery (T.M.) mill on Quarry Brook at the foot of the bog a mile west of the Northwest Ridge Road. These mills sawed logs cut in and driven from that part of the township not burned by the 1825 fire. Other pine and spruce saw-log drives went on to Sebec Lake.

A number of poplar drives came down the brook from the burn area, but no birch stumpage records were located. The Preble family, who cut on the drainage, found the lower end of the brook, about 3.5 miles from the junction of Bog and Pickerel Brooks to the lake, to be generally drivable. Some loggers drove up to 3 million board feet of logs or more on the brook. The last drive might have been the one reported in 1916 by The Piscataquis Observer.

Even though the drives on Bear Brook might have ended, the Ladd brothers found logs for milling. In 1914, they had a mill at an unknown Barnard township site. The following two years they finished hauling to the mill and started sawing about April 1; the timing suggests that they were cutting birch or some other hardwood that did not float, but they also cut pine.

In Bowerbank township, Barnard’s western neighbor, the 1825 fire burned through the whole of it and along the lake’s edge. The townships waterpower source was Mill Brook that drains into the lake at Newell Cove. The landing just west of the mouth of Mill Brook was a pri-

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23 H.F. Walling, Map of Piscataquis County (New York: Lee and Marsh, 1858)
24 Walter Wells, The Water Power of Maine (Sprague, Owen, and Nash, Printers to the state, 1869)
25 The Piscataquis Observer, April 25, 1878
26 Elsie Watters’ father showed it to her when they were out for a walk.
27 Elsie Watters never saw any logs come out of Bear Brook.
28 The Piscataquis Observer, April 23, 1914, April 1, 1915 and March 30, 1916
mary access point to Bowerbank township and the logging lands north of the lake. Both teamsters and steamers hauled to and from here, south across the lake to Blethen Landing, where teamsters completed the haul to the Foxcroft village train depot and the Dwelley spool mill that operated from 1873 until about 1964.

The pervasiveness of the 1825 fire in this township resulted in loggers ignoring it, until its birches were mature enough for the spool-making industry. Some birch loggers on the western edge of the township hauled to the birch mill at lower Greeley Falls. Others hauled through Bucks Cove and across the lake to Blethen Landing.29 Teamsters hauling birch had another destination beginning in 1889, when the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) bisected the northern third of the township and created sidings for loading rail cars. Between the time the mill at lower Greeley Falls closed (1902) and about 1920, ATCo Lombards hauled birch cordwood cut in at least the southeast portions of the township to its Milo village spool mill, a distance of over 13 miles.30

Three birch mills operated in the township; one was at the lake edge, another at the township’s center, and one in its northern sector. By 1882 someone had a sawmill on Newell Cove on the east side of the mouth of Mill Stream, which had a dam not far from the lake. This mill sawed a variety of woods that included birch that went across the lake to Blethen Landing or on to the Foxcroft village spool mill. In 1896, the mill’s saws cut 400,000 shingles from cedar harvested in the area.31 Clarke and Robinson owned the mill in 1904 and had plenty to saw.32 Fred Ladd hauled cedar to the mill in 1908.33 The mill was still sawing between April 191234 and 1917;35 the last mention of it sawing was in The Piscataquis Observer of April 14, 1921. This mill apparently did not cut the ATCo birch; the Milo village mill did the milling of the four-foot logs.36

The birch mill in the center of the township was at Mill Brook Pond and owned by Greeley, perhaps in the 1890s. In the township’s northern sector a birch mill began operations at the CPR’s Kuroki siding by 1907; its years of operation are undiscovered, but ATCo crews were cutting in this area by 1904 and continued into the late 1920s.

The other two trees loggers returned for were poplar and pine. Teamsters and Lombards hauled these logs to Bucks Cove and Kuroki siding. Lombards did not cross the lake on the ice. At Bucks Cove crews boomed the logs for the log drive.

Logging was well underway in the township when Thomas Proctor bought virtually all of it in 1884. His field book, which family members continued to record in after his death in late 1886 or early 1887 and through 1923, provided some insight on how a land owner looked after his lands and the logging activity thereon.37 Proctor walked his new property and quickly realized that a considerable number of board feet of logs had been cut without a stumpage contract. Some loggers with stumpage contracts cut beyond the defined borders and others did not cut according to other terms in the contract. He soon hired a local Maine man to oversee the logging.

James Proctor, Thomas’ son, who lived in Ipswich, Massachusetts, took over after his father’s death, and continued as his father had, including making notes in the field book. In 1903 he walked through an area that loggers cut 10–14 years earlier and he noted that the birch and poplar were growing in fast. On a visit to Mill Brook Pond in 1904 he saw the site of an old birch mill of Greeley. He noted a birch mill at Kuroki siding in 1907. In February 1908 he observed the Lombard log hauler James McNulty was using on the haul road to Bucks Cove. Fifteen years later at Bucks Cove he watched William Early’s crew boom logs in the cove.

By the late 1920s trucks joined the teamsters in hauling from Bowerbank landing across the ice on what residents called the “ice road,” a plowed strip of ice. About 1938 one or more trucks went through the ice and still rest on the lake bottom.38 When St. Regis cut in Bow-

29 conversations with Tim Merrill
30 In late March 1879 teamsters hauled ash shovel-handle blocks from Howard township down the lake and on to the mill in Brownville. Howard was the name of Willimantic township in 1880. (The Piscataquis Observer, May 27, 1879)
31 The Piscataquis Observer, April 30, 1896
32 The Piscataquis Observer, March 31, 1904
33 The Piscataquis Observer, April 2, 1908
34 The Piscataquis Observer, April 11, 1912
35 The Piscataquis Observer, April 12, 1917
36 a picture of loaded ATCo sleds revealed unmilled four-foot birch logs
37 The Proctor heirs sold their land in March 1947 to Stanley E. Merrill and Company. The transcribed copy of the Thomas Proctor Field Book that I read was made available by Tim Merrill, and is the source of this information.
38 conversation with Tim Merrill and Elsie Watters, who remembers she and her dad visited with one of the drivers after being pulled out
Chapter 3: Sebec River, Sebec Lake and tributaries

The western end of Sebec Lake is in Willimantic township. The primary access point was Packard landing south of the mouth of Big Wilson Stream. A tote road from the landing went up the south side of the stream, past lower Greeley Falls and the site of the Willimantic Thread Company mill, to Big Wilson Falls, the site of Willimantic village, where it turned south to Upper Abbot village.

The 1825 fire burned north through parts of this township touching the lake shore, but probably staying just east of Willimantic village. The unburned area west and north of the village was the source of logs for the sawmill at Willimantic village and for many drives that started at various landing areas on Big and Little Wilson streams. The southwest quadrant of the township, as drained by Davis Brook, burned. A mill at the outlet of Davis Pond sawed birch, and by 1900 loggers were driving poplar down the brook into Big Wilson Stream.

The mill at lower Greeley Falls, Willimantic Thread Company, which opened in January 1, 1880, was a large operation. In 1882 the mill used 3,000 cords of birch and employed 250 loggers.40 A year later it used 4,000 cords.41 The mill’s cutting crew in 1887 consisted of 225 men and 80 horses. The crew also cut boxwood (second quality white pine) so the local mill could manufacture the boxes it previously purchased for packaging the spools.42 A year later 100 horses did the hauling.43 By May 1, 1896 the company started their electric generation facility, 5 miles away, to run the milling machines. They also ran

39 William R. Sawtell, The Bowerbank Story (nd.)
a wire to their mill near Lake Onawa, but it failed. In April 1900 the company started up a new mill to saw the lumber for boxes. Teamsters hauled the mill’s output to the railroad at Upper Abbot village. Even though the mill at lower Greeley Falls closed in 1902, William L. Early continued a small operation that cut birch and lumber at the site until about 1925.

At the southwest corner of the lake and south of Packard landing was the mouth of tiny Bennett Ponds Brook. From time to time logging activity took place in this area drained by this brook. Some crews drove the logs on the lake and others, like the Ladd Brothers, who cut hemlock for the bark, hauled the bark to the Maine Central Railroad at Dover village for transportation to a tannery.

Four miles due east of Bennett Ponds was Blethen Landing, at about the midpoint on the lake’s south shore at the mouth of Bog Brook. Andrew Blethen built the mill in 1858. His farm was nearby and provided accommodations as needed. It became an active landing and by 1879 had a wharf and livery stable. In 1882 David Greeley bought the mill and the area became known as Greeley Landing. He added more milling capacity, opened a boarding house and a school. Greeley’s mill cut spool bars for Willimantic Thread Company. After ice out, his crew loaded them on a scow they built, and Greeley’s steamer Marion towed them down the lake to the mill.

In 1887 John Clark lumbered for Greeley above Seymour Cove, which is immediately east of The Narrows, and William Glover hauled it south across the lake to Greeley’s mill. Greeley also cut for the Dwelley mill in Foxcroft village beginning as early as 1886. By 1888 Greeley was cutting the birch bolts into spool bars and milling 800,000 board feet of hemlock, spruce, pine, and cedar. However, 10 years later in 1898 Greeley went bankrupt.

Sebec Lake Lumber Company took over the mill, but lost it in 1908 when the mill burned with 200,000 board feet of logs floating in the lake. This was the last mill at this site.

Towing log rafts and boom bags with headworks

Early loggers rafted their logs and some continued the practice into the late 1800s, whereas lumbermen elsewhere in the state of Maine began towing free-floating logs surrounded by a chain of linked logs, boom bags, c.1840. Rafting worked well for small cuts and limited lumbering operations; a small number of men could keep their log rafts close together, whether on the lake or on Ship Pond Stream or Big Wilson Stream. Those haul- ing to the lake either built rafts on the ice or piled their logs on the shore and at ice out constructed the rafts in shallow water before towing.

Whether rafted or unrafted, all logs driven down a stream were kept from floating freely out into Sebec Lake by a boom, a string of attached logs with one end tied to the shore on one side of the stream’s mouth and the other end anchored to the opposite shore. Log drivers placed such a boom when the lake was still covered with ice. Stream drives started with ice out, but that was often before the ice left the lake.

The log drivers collected the log rafts that came down the stream and combined them to create the larger rafts they wished to tow down the lake. A logger who cut a million board feet of logs could be dealing with as many as 7,142 logs, if the logs were 16 feet long and 16 inches in diameter and assuming the scalar’s use of the Bangor Rule, one of a number of scaling formulas. Drivers might have made rafts of multiple tiers of logs. The rafts had to fit through any of the lake’s narrows.

Preparing free-floating logs for a journey down the lake was more involved. If a drive of free-floating logs was going to reach the lake after the ice was out, then the drive boss positioned a boom bag to catch the logs. Once the bag was the desired size, a crew replaced it with another bag, and repeated the sequence until all the logs were in a bag. If the logs arrived before ice out or were placed on the ice within the confines of a boom resting on the ice, then once the ice melted, a bateau crew towed one end of an open boom bag through the mass of floating logs so as to encircle the number of logs desired for

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44 The Industrial Journal, January 31, February 21, and May 1, 1896
45 The Industrial Journal, April 20, 1900
46 Maine Register, State Year-book and Legislative Manual, issues of 1900–1930
47 The Piscataquis Observer, March 26, 1914
48 Dorothy Blanchard, Old Sebec Lake (Dover, NH: Arcadia Publications, 1997)
49 The Piscataquis Observer, May 26, 1892
50 The Piscataquis Observer, April 14 and May 19,1887
51 The Industrial Journal, April 9, 1886
52 The Industrial Journal, April 6, 1888
54 The Industrial Journal, June 1908
the boom bag. The crew repeated the process until all logs were in a bag.

This booming strategy worked well at the mouth of Big Wilson Stream, but the mouth of Ship Pond Stream at Bucks Cove and its narrow exit required a more extensive strategy for unrafted logs. If the drive boss filled boom bags in the cove, then, given the width of the cove’s outlet, the boom bag diameter had to be 264 feet or less, a size much smaller than those crews were known to have towed with headworks on Sebec Lake. However, the early drives on the lake were perhaps for small quantities of logs and therefore the 264 foot narrows, the narrowest one on the lake, was of no consequence.

Early boom bags were also small on account of the method of linking the logs of the boom bag; too many logs in a boom bag could cause some link to break. A bag’s boom logs were typically 28 feet long with a minimum 13-inch diameter and a drilled hole at each end. Yellow birch pins with maple plugs to hold them in place kept the boom logs connected. An alternating pinning style provided flexibility. Drivers pinned two logs vertically to enable horizontal movement, and pinned the next log to those horizontally for vertical flexibility. By 1886 drivers were using boom chains to link the boom logs; these improved the boom bags flexibility and strength.

If the drive boss wanted larger boom bags, then his crews could have combined the small boom bags into the desired size once beyond the confines of Bucks Cove, a relatively easy maneuver. The drive boss was conscious of the fact that the eastern-most 4 miles of lake was narrow so the booms had to remain small enough to reach Bear Brook Cove, where the crew probably opened the boom bag and the current carried the logs the remaining mile to the Sebec village dam.

Whether the drive crew rafted logs or made boom bags, they built a headworks with which they towed the rafts or boom bags down the lake. A headworks was a large log raft with a capstan fitted to a keyhole near the center of the raft. Its base rested on a big piece of pork rind, a source of lubrication. The crew kept the center post greased with heavy coats of lard. A team of eight to sixteen men pushed on wooden arms to turn the capstan. Using up to a 9-inch in circumference short hemp cable, the crew attached a raft’s 5-inch diameter hardwood post, set in a drilled hole, to the boom bag or raft.

A headworks was capable of moving either a boom bag of up to 1.5 million board feet of long logs or its cord equivalent in lake surface covered, about 1,500 to 3,000 cords depending on the diameter of the logs, at about one-quarter mile per hour. Attached to the capstan was one end of a 1.5 to 2-inch thick 800 to 1,000 foot rope; at the other end was a 250 to 500-pound anchor. As a bateau crew began moving the anchor down the lake, a crew of four men on the raft helped unwind the rope from the capstan. Once the rope was fully extended, they dropped the anchor. Men on the headworks then turned the capstan, which wound in the rope pulling the raft and boomed logs to the anchor. When the headworks reached the anchor, the bateau crew raised it and transported the anchor another rope’s length across the lake. They repeated the process until the boom bag reached its destination. When windy, the crew anchored the boom bag to the shore; otherwise, they towed night and day in favorable weather. In some instances, crews used two headworks lashed together. As they wound in one line, they unwound the other and dropped the second anchor as they lifted the first anchor. As they moved down the lake, men in a bateau circled the edge of the boom bag watching for any breaks in the bag.

Typically, the headworks towed as close to shore as possible as a hedge against being caught in a sudden wind and losing the boom bag or having it break apart. If the breeze was quartering off shore, the crew did not use the anchor, but played out the towline by wrapping it around a tree on shore to control the speed of the boom as the wind pushed the boom out into and down the lake (warping). If the breeze was quartering on shore, then the headworks used the anchor and towed from the shoreline of the boom that the wind pushed toward shore. With a breeze from the rear, the crew positioned the headworks at the rear of the boom, anchored it, wrapped the line around a post set in the raft, and warped the boom down the lake. The friction was often so great that even with wet ropes, the capstan smoked and occasionally caught fire. Tension on the ropes sometimes caused them to snap, and when that happened, men were either hurt or killed by the whip of the recoil. An unfavorable breeze or heavy fog halted the progress, and the crew tied off the boom to the shore or an island. When towing at

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55 Headworks on the West Branch of the Penobscot River watershed towed booms twice this size at the same speed. Speed is a function of the size of the capstan and number of men turning it.

night to avoid the wind, the crew used fires on the shores to help guide them.

The size of boom bags and log rafts as towed by a headworks varied, but they had to fit through all the lake’s narrows without scraping along the shores in the final 4 miles. Once out of Bucks Cove the first encounter was 4 miles away at The Narrows, 790 feet wide and devoid of obstacles. Another 4 miles down the lake at Pine Island the second narrows was 580 feet wide. East of Pine Island is nearly 4 miles of narrow lake with three other narrows, the narrowest of which is 370 feet.

The drive boss’ last lake challenge was the final mile to the dam, an area that had current. To tow into the dam was to get trapped by either the trailing boom bag or the current and not be able to retreat back up the lake to tow another boom bag.

Alternatively, when the headworks reached the foot of Bear Brook Cove, the start of the current and the last mile, the crew detached the tow rope from the boom bag, let its momentum and the current carry it into the narrows, and then opened it so the current swept the logs out of the bag. Meanwhile the headworks had attached a rope to the back of the emptying boom bag to keep it from floating toward the dam and so the crew could pull it back up the lake and reuse it.

Pictures of long-log drives at the Sebec village dam showed boom logs lining the cove and suggested the current carried the logs to the dam. No bateaux of men with pick poles were on the cove moving logs. The drivers were working between the dam and the bridge from the fixed booms that channeled logs moved by the current into the sluice. The drive crew used the booms lining the cove to pull the logs that drifted to the edges back into the current.

Potentially complicating matters at Bear Cove were the log drives on Bear Brook that empties into the cove. The stream had good current that would have sent the logs from the brook toward the current exiting the cove. A crew might have placed a few side booms to provide a channel. The key factor at this site was timing; not having a drive from the lake and one from the stream arrive at the same time.

**Towing with steamboats**

Drivers did not totally abandon the use of headworks when towboats became available. The reasons for opting for a headworks versus a towboat are unknown. In 1901, Thomas Gilbert used headworks to move his drive the length of Sebec Lake. Nine years later in 1910 Sawyer also used headworks.

When the first steamer started towing is speculative. In 1857 William N. Thompson and Lathrup C. Jones received a charter from the Maine state legislature for the first of the lake’s powerboats. The capabilities of their boat, as powered by four horses, are unknown. In 1861, these same two men, with the support of a legislative act, formed the Sebec Lake Steamboat Company and launched a steamboat of not more than 50 tons. The act required the transportation of passengers and freight between Sebec village and the head of the lake daily, except Sunday for the months of July and August, for 14 years beginning July 1862. The company sought and received amendments for small adjustments in dates of operation in July and August. The last amendment to their charter was in 1870 and it stipulated that if the company did not operate in July and August, then anyone else with a boat on the lake could offer the services. The owners sought this amendment because they anticipated not continuing operations.

As early as perhaps 1866 other steamboats began to ply the lake. Whether or not these owners had any relationship with the steamship company is unknown.

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57 Acts and Resolves and Special Laws of the State of Maine passed by the Legislature of the state of Maine
er owners could have offered services in other months of the year. By 1866 someone had a 15-horsepower boat.58 In 1868 Captain Ansel G. Crockett (a Willimantic farmer) spent $5,000 to build and launch a new 20-horsepower steamer; 90 feet long, 24 feet wide, with six to eight state-rooms, and a capacity of 500 people.59 The Rippling Wave was another steamer in operation in 1871.60 Both the 15 and the 20-horsepower boats were powerful enough to tow boom bags.61

By 1876, the last year of the Sebec Lake Steamboat Company’s charter, Captain Crockett and Associates took over the company and received a legislature-ap-proved charter extending the company’s exclusive rights on the lake for another 14 years. The renewed charter included the same conditions for July and August service and exclusive rights to all towing and “will otherwise run with proper notice.” In 1879 Crockett launched Forest Queen.62 The steamer Greenwoods with Captain J.K. Robbins, probably one of the associates, made a first trip up Sebec Lake in spring 1881.63

No legislative act in 1890 extended the steamboat company’s exclusive right to Sebec Lake’s transportation. In May 1892 David Greeley had the steamer Marion tow his scow loaded with spool bars and milled lumber.64 For the log drive of spring 1896 Crockett, working for Perham and Gould, towed log rafts amounting to 8 million board feet of logs. Crockett was still towing in 1898 when the Clark Brothers were cutting firewood for his steamer. A year later W.R. Clarke bought a small steamer for transporting tourists and Greeley launched a new steamer to tow boom bags.65 Crockett launched a new steamer in 1900, bringing his fleet to at least two.66 His sons Charles E. Crockett and Fred A. Crockett had by this time joined the business. In 1901 Crockett’s boats Vivian and Goldenrod towed 7 million board feet of logs for E.T. Spencer’s drive.67 Five years later Fred A. Crockett was still captaining a steamer, and his brother, Charles, helped with repairs.68 Fred Crockett towed logs in 1909 on a contract with W.R. Clarke, another tower on the lake and a partner of Robinson, owner of two steamers.69 A year later Clarke bought Goldenrod, and G.P. Gordon also operated a steamer.70 Harry Coy was towing in summer 1913 with his steamer, Leola.71 Ansel Crockett died in 1912, Charles turned to farming by 1920, and Fred remained in the steamer business into the 1920s. By 1913 Fred was captain for Clarke on the Goldenrod, and Clarke sold his other steamer, Restless, to Forest Turner of Willimantic.72 A year later the steamer Marion rejoined the fleet on the lake; it had been in a dry dock for a few years.73 By 1920 Coy was captain of Marion.74 In the winter he was a scalar, and in the spring he towed log booms until about 1931.75 In 1927 Cliff Foss bought the Ellsie, the last of the ATCo boats on Schoodic Lake, and moved it to Sebec Lake. Crockett and Clark had their steamer the Goldenrod dismantled in November 1936.76 Foss sold Ellsie in 1946 to St. Regis Paper Company and they used it to tow boom bags. Late one night during the towing operation in either 1946 or 1947 the boat burned and sank in The Narrows. Roscoe Lamson Jr. and Lee Nason were both on the boat and had to jump into the lake to escape.77

59 The Piscataquis Observer, May 7, 1868
60 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, May 29, 1871
61 On steam engines, 20 hp is not 20 hp by today’s combustion engine standards; it is more like 60 hp. On combustion engines the initial explosion dies off immediately, but in a steam engine, the steam is pushing down on the piston all the way to the end of the cylinder and that creates an extreme amount of torque. If the size of the propeller or the side paddle-wheels are large in diameter and the engine has lots of torque, a boat could move massive loads easily, not speedily. Even at 15 hp, using steam, with the largest wheel it could swing, a boat could tow a great deal.
63 The Piscataquis Observer, May 5, 1881
64 The Piscataquis Observer, May 26, 1892
65 The Piscataquis Observer, April 13 and April 20, 1899
66 The Piscataquis Observer, May 10, 1900
67 The Piscataquis Observer, May 2, 1901
68 The Piscataquis Observer, May 10, May 17, 1906
70 The Piscataquis Observer, April 14 and April 21, 1910
72 The Piscataquis Observer, May 8 and May 15, 1913
73 The Piscataquis Observer, May 21, 1914 Who the owner was is unknown.
74 Dorothy A. Blanchard, Old Sebec Lake (Dover, NH: Arcadia Publications, 1997) and Stephen Rainsford, Around Dover-Foxcroft (Portsmouth, NH: Acadia Publishing, 2008)
75 William W. Geller, Piscataquis Project, Sporting Camps in the Piscataquis Watershed, Section D, https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory/120
77 In 1947 the Lamson family, after a century in the logging business, moved to Sebec Corner where they took up dairy farm-
The early towing process on Sebec Lake is undiscovered, but might at various times have mirrored that of towboats in the Lower Chain Lakes of the West Branch of the Penobscot watershed. A number of men who drove on the West Branch also drove on Sebec Lake.

The steamboats towed logs at three-quarters mile per hour, generally during daylight in favorable weather conditions, and faced situations similar to those of a headworks. The major reason for the slow speed was the pressure of the floating logs on the boom that would force them under its edge. The distance between the towboat and the bag was always substantial so that the wake of the boat would not disturb the boom. When a towboat encountered a headwind or fog, it stopped and the drive crew in a support boat or two tied off the boom bag to a large tree or rock outcrop. Such support boats also repaired any boom bags that broke during the tow. Breaks were frequent prior to the use of boom chains. If towing did occur at night, fires on the shore helped guide the towboat.

Drivers and towboat captains, like those using headworks, faced the same challenges at both ends of Sebec Lake. During this era logs entered Bucks Cove from Ship Pond Stream and Lombard log haulers hauled many sleds of logs out onto the ice in its northeast corner, well away from any current or momentum of moving logs from Ship Pond Stream. One boom contained these logs and in the spring, river drivers maneuvered them in boom bags that fit through the cove’s narrows so they could combine several of the smaller boom bags into one before towing the logs down the lake. As logs came down Ship Pond Stream into Bucks Cove the log drivers captured them in boom bags that fit through the cove’s narrow outlet and once through, they combined the bags to reach an optimal size.

Given all the narrows, the size of the boom bags constructed by the drivers was important to the towboat captain. Some clues exist about the size of Sebec Lake boom bags as towed by boats. Crockett once used five boom bags in towing 7 million board feet of logs. The two boom bags Packard and Sawyer used for their 1898 cut of 3 million board feet of logs were probably equal in size. If the Packard and Sawyer logs were 16 feet long and averaged 16 inches in diameter, then 1.5 million board feet of their logs covered a surface area of 228,540 square feet, assuming a solid mass of packed logs. A circle with that number of square feet would have a diameter of 540 feet. Given there would be some spaces among the logs, the 540 feet were a minimum. When towing a boom bag, it does not move as a circle, but more like a teardrop, so its maximum width is not the circle’s diameter. Neither the Crockett nor the Packard boom bags could pass through the narrow exit of Bucks Cove; therefore, they put multiple small bags together outside the cove. In terms of cord-wood a boom bag filled with about 1,500 cords of six-inch diameter four-foot logs or 3,000 cords for logs a foot in diameter would be equivalent to the Crocket long-log boom bags.

Both Crockett’s and Packard’s boom bags fit through The Narrows and the first narrows below Pine Island, but they would not fit through the narrows at the foot of Lyford Cove or the narrows leading into Bear Brook Cove. To enter Lyford and Bear coves the drivers and captains might have rolled the boom bag. To roll a boom bag the drive crew prepared a special boom bag by closing the bag as usual and then wrapping an empty boom bag around the filled boom bag. As the towboat began to pass into a narrows the crew detached the towline. The crew in an attending boat disconnected one end of the empty boom bag, affixed the other end so the two boom bags became one, and either let the unfilled portion float or they pulled it through the narrows. The towboat crew reconnected the towline and it began to pull until the trailing full boom bag was at the narrows. The attending boat began to push the rear of the filled boom, first on one side and then on the other. The momentum of the logs in the boom bag and the pushing began to send the logs out of the filled portion of the boom bag into the attached empty boom bag on the other side of the

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78 Jerry Packard has also thought about the width of narrows and size of boom bags. Proctor observed William Early in 1923 booming logs for towing within Bucks Cove.

79 The Piscataquis Observer, May 12, 1898

80 William R. Sawtell, Old Sebec, Volume 1 (Old Town, ME: Howland’s Printing, 1999). Sawtell’s book cites the volume as 10,000 cords, which would equate to a boom bag diameter of 3,200 feet: perhaps it was 1,000 cords, which was still too big for the narrows and could have caused damage to land property.
narrow. As one boat pushed, the towboat crew again detached the towline and reattached it, first to one side and pulled, and then the other side and pulled. The synchronized pushing and pulling moved the logs and once all the logs were through, the assisting boat took up the slack and re-created the double boom bag that the towboat resumed towing. This strategy works as long as the shoreline is free of wharfs and boats.

At the foot of the lake, between Bear Cove and the Sebec village dam, towboats faced the same problem as headworks: the potential of being either trapped or crushed or both against the cove's shore by a wind or momentum of the boom bag. If the towboat came into the dam, it could turn north into the cove, but it would remain there until drivers sluiced the logs. The drive boss could not let this happen because his crew generally held logs behind the dam until they were all towed. More likely the boat would have moved out of the way where the headworks did at Bear Cove and returned up the lake towing an empty boom bag.

Those who towed boom bags at the end of the log drive era in the 1940s preferred to have boom bags that fit through all the narrows without having to roll the boom. Chris Preble and Lee Nason, who towed pulpwood from Bucks Cove for different operators, liked to size their boom bags to fit through the narrows. One of the first six years in the 1940s, when Lamson was towing for St. Regis Paper Company, the company forced him to fill the boom bags with more logs than he wanted. In towing them down the lake the width of the boom bag in the narrow portions of the lake destroyed many wharfs and some boats.

The stories Lamson and Preble shared with their sons provided some insights on towing strategies. Some times in a wind the boat simply held the boom bags in place. They grumbled about adverse winds and having to chase down logs lost from the boom bags. As part of their work they opened, closed, and refilled boom bags. At times they turned the towboat around and used the propeller to push the water that moved the logs, and sometimes they used their boats on the backside of the booms. Where on the lake they used such strategies is unknown, but they are actions that are associated with narrows and rolling a boom and moving logs where current is needed.

### The Sebec village cove in the 1940s

In the late 1940s the cove at the Sebec village dam was a busy place. The Ernest Ladd mill, which operated during the spring and into the early summer, was above the cove's north edge on the low hillside and drew its long logs from the water on a conveyor. Sawyers, like Lee Nason, milled suitable logs and cut unsuitable logs to pulp-length and put them back into the cove. The Ladd crew lived in tents above the mill and ate in the cook shack also on the hillside. Pulpwood for St. Regis Paper Company came into the cove via the water. Their trucks also hauled it in and a crew stacked it on a lot with a small mill just east of the Ladd mill. By ice out a crew stretched the big boom with its huge logs and chains across the mouth of the cove so no pulpwood would put additional pressure on the dam, but water current occasionally pushed some logs under the boom. All anyone could see was logs and no water. Two side booms were in place to direct the logs to the open dam gate. Boom logs lined the cove so the floating wood would not get hung up on the bank and so the drivers could use them to pull errant logs back into the current.

A young person who never missed the start of a drive was Elsie Nason (Watters), who lived with her parents, Stella and Lee, in a house overlooking the lake's dam and impoundment. She and everyone else knew the day the drive was to start and they were all there for it. When they saw a drive crew member light the dynamite fuse and tuck it into the boom logs at the head of the channel to the sluice, they all ran from the bridge, ducked, and watched. The blast sent up a fountain of water and logs that came splashing down, and, as the current rushed the logs into the sluice, Elsie and her friends all ran back onto the bridge to continue watching. Men stood on the boom logs, which guided the pulpwood into the sluice, and with long pick-poles made sure no log got crosswise to the current. The current moved the logs so no one needed to be in a bateau out in the cove pushing logs to the dam; they got sucked in. She never saw or heard her father talk about a boom that would keep logs from being blown back up the lake; the current might have been sufficient to hold them in place. The final favorite moment of the drive was when the last log went through and river drivers in their bateaux shot through the dam sluice to begin picking the rear.

At the time of the drive the cove and dam area had many attractions for Elsie and other children. As the
cove began to empty of logs, Elsie and her friends went to the north side of the cove, where they watched the men roll the big piles of logs into the cove. When the drivers were not rolling in the logs, Elsie and her friends loved to play log driver, walking the logs with a pole. Another favorite spot was the drive camp about a half-mile below the dam on the south edge of the river. Elsie used to go down there to visit Ruben Ladd, the cook, who always gave her some treat to eat, things she never had at home.

Elsie had first-hand experience with towing long log boom bags into the cove at the village. She used to accompany her father in a motorized bateau when he hauled booms for Ernest Ladd. Her experiences were all on the east half of the lake, the narrow portions. Nason sized the boom bags so they fit through all the narrows above the Ladd mill at the dam. Elsie described the towing as deliberately slow and difficult with a wind. For her, a child, the towing was scary, with the big boom and its bouncing and banging logs so close to the boat; she thought they might all collide.

Another of Elsie’s playgrounds became Abner Morrison’s beached steamer on the north side of the cove below her home. She remembered this two-decker steamer, with its polished wood and canopies, coming into the cove to pick up and leave off passengers. The steamers did not come in during high water; they waited until after the drives ended and the current slowed down. Business for Abner’s steamer declined and one day it came in for the last time and he pulled it up on shore. Abner removed nothing from it, not even the dishes and other pieces of the galley; it was just the way it was on the water. Elsie was dismayed by its abandonment, but loved playing on it.

During the spring when the water was up and the gates opened for the drive Elsie and her friends were well aware of the lurking dangers. They knew to stay out of the water in the channel that extended from the dam up stream to Bear Cove. Even in the summer, when they swam at the small beach on the south side of the cove behind the store, whose owner made the sand beach for the children, they were careful.

Elsie witnessed the last of the big drives passing through the Sebec dam and after that in the late 1940s she watched a different type of St. Regis operation. The company moved from the north side of the cove up the impoundment a short distance on the south side, where a crew took out the pulpwood on a conveyor and trucked it to their Bucksport mill. Drivers towed the small boom bags to the conveyor area and left them anchored until nearly all had been towed. Then they opened the small bags one at a time and pushed the logs to the conveyor. After that activity ended in 1953, Elsie only remembered trucks loaded with pulpwood passing through town.

**Lombard log hauler use around Sebec Lake**

By the time Elsie was born the use of Lombards had passed, but the stories about them going by her home loaded with supplies and birch persisted. Her parents and an old woodsman, whom her mom took care of, shared what they had witnessed. The Lombards first started passing through town in an unknown year after 1902, when the Willimantic spool mill closed at the head of the lake and the ATCo spool mill opened in Milo village (1902); perhaps c.1906.\(^1\) They came from the west on the north side of the lake on the Lombard road, crossed the bridge above the dam, and then made an immediate left turn to continue on to Milo village. From the old woodsman Elsie learned that the Lombards came out of the woods onto the lake ice of Bucks Cove to unload, turn around, and return to the various cutting camps in Bowerbank township. Her dad told her the Lombards did not travel on the ice at the lower end of the lake; the ice could never be trusted due to currents in the narrow sections.

Elsie, with her dad, followed the road that a crew had built for the Lombards from her home west across the cove’s causeway, up and over the rise and back to the edge of the lake that it followed closely before it crossed the lower end of Bear Brook and then cut across the backside of Bear Point. The next known road location was the crossing of Mill Stream near the Bowerbank village. Here her dad pointed out the old haul road bridge abutments.

Bowerbank village was the nexus of a number of haul roads leading west, north, and south. The Lombards continued northwest into the interior of Bowerbank township on the road to pick up birch for the Milo village mill. The road south went to a lake landing, which was west of the mouth of Mill Stream, and across the lake ice to

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81 Alvin Lombard built his first log hauler at his Waterville, ME factory in 1900; one operated in Eustis, ME in 1901. By 1906 loggers were using three Lombards in Bowerbank township to haul logs onto the west end of the lake 24 hours per day.
Blethen Landing. For years teamsters, and later truckers, crossed the lake with racks of birch and milled lumber. When Elsie was a young child her father took her to the landing one day to visit a man who, the day before, had survived going through the ice in a log-loaded truck. No recorded history suggests Lombards towed on this route.

Lombards probably stopped hauling through Sebec village around 1920. Pictures from 1917 and 1918 show them passing through Sebec village pulling as many as four sleds of birch. However, a couple of years later in 1920 ATCo bought the lands north of the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR), where it crosses the northern part of Bowerbank township. Their main camp was at Kuroki siding, where they had a birch mill and crews loaded birch on rail cars.

Lombards also dumped substantial quantities of logs on the lake’s ice. Landing Camp, which was on the east shore of Bucks Cove on the north side of the drainage from Bear Pond, was one of those sites. About 1906 Walter Arnold, as a thirteen-year-old, began a job of unloading Lombards on the ice at Landing Camp. Three Lombards, each with three racks with big 16-to-24-foot pine logs and hauling 24 hours per day, reached the landing three times per day for immediate unloading and stacking on the ice. The landing crew ate and slept after each unloading. A fourth Lombard was back in the cutting area hauling logs to make up the larger loads pulled to the lake.

Logging and driving activity on Sebec Lake

Little information is available about log drives on the lake between 1800 and 1880. Perhaps as early as the 1820s, logs came into the lake from Big Wilson and Ship Pond streams. In early May 1850 a group of at least four men were bringing rafts of logs down the lake and they had an encampment some place on the lake. Rafted logs carrying birch arrived at Sebec village dam on May 22, 1862, and were put over the dam, but the birch shifted and turned the raft over. Charles Hersey of Foxcroft, who was part of the crew working below the dam, was hit, fell in, and drowned. In 1872, a drive came out of Ship Pond Stream. The Piscataquis Observer of May 2, 1878 reported that in past years loggers in Bowerbank township drove some pine, spruce, and hemlock in rafts to Sebec village mill and a great deal went on to Bangor. Ward Scripture of Milo had his drive of 500,000 board feet of logs in spring 1878 towed down the lake from Bucks Cove by steamer. It took his crew a half-day to sluice the logs at the Sebec dam.

The small number of both logging and log driving accounts until the 1870s was in part a consequence of the fire of 1825 that engulfed the lake and the great distances to reach the relatively small unburned areas drained by Bear Brook, Big Wilson Stream, and Long Pond Stream.

1880–1885: Beginning in 1880 The Piscataquis Observer reporting began to include logging and log drive operations. Recorded drives were on Big Wilson Stream in 1881 and 1883. In 1885 a cut of 1,500 cords of poplar was on the Sebec Lake ice at an unknown location waiting for a crew to drive it to the Parker and Bailey excelsior mill in Milo village. The poplar was apparently rafted, for drivers sluiced “a raft of 1,000 cords” during the week of May 21, 1885, when the ice finally went out. H.W. and J.W. Marsh of Argyle cut 400,000 board feet of logs at an unknown location and drove them through the lake and the Sebec dam as of May 21, 1885.

1887: A. Dow dumped his cut on the lake, towed it to the dam, and drove it to Milo village; it was probably poplar for the excelsior mill. By May 26 the Holbrook and Hodgdon drive of 500,000 board feet of logs reached Milo village, where sluicing took several days. The source of the logs and their destination are unknown.

1888–1889: Spearin operated near the lake, landed the cut of 500,000 board feet of logs on the lake, towed to the dam, and drove to the Piscataquis River. Similarly,
Cushman of Orneville cut 900,000 board feet of logs. The destination of both cuts was presumed to be in the Old Town and Bangor area. Cushman was back the next year and cut a million board feet of pine logs that his drivers moved through the waterways to the Penobscot boom.

1890: Sawyer cut 2 million board feet of logs on the Adams brother’s land on the west side of the lake. Coffin and Bailey cut at the head of the lake. Albert H. Gould had 500,000 board feet of logs at an unknown landing site. The Burr brothers cut on Egery land 2 miles up Bear Brook and drove the cut into the lake.

1891: Several lumbermen drove cooperatively. A drive came out the mouth of Big Wilson Stream. The E.L. Chase drive of a million board feet of logs, probably from Ship Pond Stream, reached the head of the lake when it was still frozen, so the men went home until the lake ice was out ten days later. The drive reached the Sebec village dam on May 10 and the crew began sluicing the next day. The Piscataquis Observer of May 21 reported that the drive reached Milo village impoundment May 17, but a headwind held it up for two days, so the crew worked nights when it was calm. Chase timed this drive to join the E.T. Spencer drive on the Piscataquis River. Morrison and Richardson, who probably cut poplar, since it was going to a Milo village mill, drove into the lake on an unnamed brook. They held their cut in a boom in order for the Chase drive to pass. Frank Sampson, with the assistance of a legislative act, built dams on Salmon Brook that flows south into the Sebec River below Sebec village dam; his cut, perhaps of poplar, was in the river by May 28 and headed for a Milo village mill.

1893: Logs spilled out of Big Wilson Stream.

1894: Drives from both Ship Pond and Big Wilson streams came across the lake.

1895: Dean and Gould’s cut of poplar went either to the Milo village excelsior mill or down river to one of the pulp mills on the Penobscot River. Other logs came down Ship Pond Stream.

1896: The drive under the direction of Perham was one of the largest in years; 8 million board feet of logs. Gould and Perham sent 1.5 million board feet of logs down Wilson Stream. From Ship Pond Stream came 1.5 million board feet of logs cut by a James Spencer crew and another 1.1 million cut by McLeod’s loggers. Three other loggers had logs on the lake: Spencer with 1.5 million board feet of logs, Boxton and Gibbons with 750,000 and Bailey with a million. Captain Crockett towed the boom bags.

1897: Gould and Dean drove again, this time to Howland Pulp and Paper Company; where they cut is unknown. The Clark Brothers cut the firewood used by Captain Crockett’s steamer. By May 12 the Packard and Sawyer cut of 3 million board feet of logs for the Howland Pulp and Paper mill was waiting behind a boom near the Sebec village dam for the Gould and Dean drive to clear. The drive stopped for several days due to a high headwind; high water broke the drive’s jam at the Sebec village dam and Gould lost those logs. The Packard drive took two boom bags, two round trips on the lake. The Burr brothers cut and drove pine and spruce out of Bear Brook into Bear Cove. Here they joined the drive of spruce and pine. Bailey also had a boom bag of poplar for the Boston Excelsior mill in Milo village. This year’s drive also included logs from both Ship Pond and Big Wilson streams.

1898: Logs came into the boom bags at the mouth of Big Wilson Stream. Additionally, a large amount of pulpwood went into the Sebec River from Barnard. In early April 15 men were rolling logs onto the ice either on the river below the Sebec village dam or the cove behind the dam; teamsters hauled to these sites. The loggers included the crews of Gould and Herbert Ladd, Frank and Edward Ladd, the McNaughton brothers, and E.W. Downes. The spruce logs were going to the Howland Pulp and Paper mill, the pine to Bangor, and the poplar to Boston Excelsior Company in Milo village.

1899: David Greeley towed boom bags amounting to 8 million board feet from the head of the lake for Bailey and Sawyer. A.E. Gould drove logs across the lake from some unknown site. Whether the logs of any of these

93 The Piscataquis Observer, May 24, 1888
94 The Piscataquis Observer, May 9, 1889
95 William R. Sawtell, Old Sebec, Volume 1 (Old Town, ME: Howland’s Printing, 1999)
96 The Piscataquis Observer, May 7, May 14, May 21, 1891
97 The Piscataquis Observer, May 7, 1891
98 The Piscataquis Observer, April 25, 1895
99 The Piscataquis Observer, April 9, 1896; The Industrial Journal, May 1, 1896
100 The Industrial Journal, April 15, 1898
101 The Piscataquis Observer, April 20 and 27, 1899; the May 18 issue listed Sawyer and Packard; perhaps it was Bailey, Sawyer and Packard.
men were the ones that came down Big Wilson Stream.

1900: The total board feet of logs for the drives that crews sluiced from Sebec Lake amounted to 13 million. A.G. Crockett towed the boom bags from Big Wilson Stream. The Spencer drive took ten days to sluice at Milo village.

1901: E.W. Downs and his crew of 12 men drove sawlogs on Bear Brook and joined the Spencer drive from Big Wilson Steam. Downs’ logs, cut from an 1825 unburned area in Barnard, were for the William Engel mill in Bangor. During that drive season George Thompson towed 10 million board feet of logs destined for the Bangor mills with his tow boat Linwood. Thompson owned the Grand View House at The Narrows; his boat burned in 1903.

1902: Thomas Gilbert’s boom of 2,000 cords of poplar came from Bowerbank township and was for the Boston Excelsior mill in Milo village; the wind broke the boom and scattered the logs. He also had a cut of 4 million board feet of logs that came into the lake on Ship Pond Stream. Joining this drive were those of Annis (William) and Holbrook’s (1.5 million) and Spencer’s (1 million) from Big Wilson Stream.

1903–1905: These drives included logs from Big Wilson and Ship Pond streams. In 1903 Gilbert sent 3 to 4 million board feet of logs down Ship Pond Stream and Spencer had 3 million board feet of logs in Wilson Stream. The volume of the 1904 drives were such that all steamers on the lake participated in towing. In 1905 Greeley sawed poplar into four-foot lengths at his Blethen Landing mill and boomed it for driving to Boston Excelsior Company in Milo village. The total board feet of logs that year passing through Sebec village was an estimated 13 million.

1906: The drive included logs from Big Wilson Stream and Bear Brook. Fred Crockett did the towing with his boats. Annis had 126 men to drive his cut of 4 million board feet of logs on Bear Brook into Sebec Lake.

1907: Sawyer and Hichborn owned the drive of 2.5 million board feet of logs that entered Sebec Lake from Big Wilson Stream. Gilbert cut 3.5 million board feet of logs some place near Lake Onawa in Eliotville township; his drive probably came down Ship Pond Stream. The other drive, presumably large, coming across the lake from Bucks Cove, was McNulty’s. Joining the drive on Sebec Lake was Foster and Packard with 3 million feet board feet of logs. Fred Crockett did the towing with his boats, but the towing was slow given high winds.

1908: The drives were both landed on and driven to the lake. Annis was again driving Bear Brook. Where he started the drive on the stream about April 26 is undiscovered, but on May 7 his drive camp was at the bridge 1.15 miles from Sebec Lake. The drive cleared Bear Brook on May 12 and the tents of the drivers were at Sebec village. The destination of the drive is unknown, as is the genus of the logs. Packard’s teams hauled the cut in the eastern portion of Bowerbank township onto the ice at Newell Cove and Annis hauled in the boom chains for the boom bag placed on the ice. At the lake’s southwest corner on Bennett Brook, W.A. Pfuntner cut and hauled 115,000 board feet of logs for ATCo. This was perhaps birch that he cut and hauled before ice out. McNulty had a drive from a cut in Barnard, but it is not known whether this came into Sebec Lake or went down Roaring Brook. Ernest Ladd, who along with his son, would carry on significant logging activities in the region for the next 50 plus years, clerked for the drive. Gilbert cut 3 million board feet of logs at an unknown location and they too crossed Sebec Lake.

1909: The drive of 15 million board feet of logs across Sebec Lake was one of the largest to date. Crews landed 9 million board feet of logs on the ice at Bucks Cove, 2.5 million arrived via Ship Stream with 1.5 million being...

102 *The Piscataquis Observer*, May 10 and 24, 1900
103 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 18, 1901
105 *The Piscataquis Observer*, May 1 and May 15, 1902
106 *The Industrial Journal*, April 1902
107 *The Industrial Journal*, March 1903
109 *The Piscataquis Observer*, March 30, 1905
111 *The Piscataquis Observer*, March 29 and May 10, 1906
112 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 25, 1907; *The Industrial Journal*, April 1907
113 *The Piscataquis Observer*, May 23, 1907; *The Industrial Journal*, April 1907
114 *The Piscataquis Observer*, May 7 and May 14, 1908
115 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 9 and April 16, 1908
116 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 2, 1908
117 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 23 and May 7, 1908
118 *The Industrial Journal*, April 1908
119 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 15 and April 22, 1909; *The Industrial Journal*, May 1909

105
the Gilbert cut. McNulty cut 3 million in the Buttermilk Pond area and O.B. Packard cut another 2 million in the same area. Both men landed their cuts in Bucks Cove. A considerable amount of the Packard cut was for the Milo village excelsior mill. Another 4 million board feet of logs came through the mouth of Big Wilson Stream, most of it being Sawyer’s. Fred M. Strout (of Milo) cut 1.5 million board feet of logs at an unknown location and landed it on the lake; he had another 1.5 million board feet of logs for ATCo in Milo village. Near the foot of the lake L.E. Moore of Sebec village drove 500,000 board feet of logs on Bear Brook. Clark and Robinson had a towing contract for 7 million board feet of logs and hired Fred Crockett and his boat Goldenrod to help with the towing. A headworks towed the logs from the mouth of Big Wilson Stream.

1910: Three lumbermen had their logs pass through Sebec Lake. Sawyer drove his logs into Bucks Cove on Ship Pond Stream and towed them across the lake with a headworks. McNulty either landed on or drove his logs into Bucks Cove. Perham had logs in a boom at the head of the lake, but no other information was available.120

1911: The steamboats towed 14 million board feet of logs put into Bucks Cove. The boats of Clarke and Robinson (3), G.P. Thompson (2) and Charles Crockett (1) towed them all in seven days, a record time. Teamsters landed some logs at unknown places on the lake. Whether any came to the lake on Ship Pond Stream is unknown. McNulty had a cut on Bear Brook; a two-week drive with 130 men. The other towing this year was for booms headed to ATCo and Boston Excelsior mills in Milo village. One boom may have been the cut of Stratford; it came to the lake on Ship Pond Stream. Someone also had logs in a boom at Beaver Brook in Newell Cove. Clarke and Robinson did the towing.134

1912: The size of the drives must have been substantial because Clarke had the towing contract, used his boats, and hired the boats of Fred Crockett and Levenslor of Sebec village.122 Strout drove logs from Big Wilson Stream. George and Seth Bessey drove on the same stream, but their drive got hung up about April 24 and whether or not it ever reached the lake is unknown.123 Wingate brothers cut some place in Barnard.124 Annis drove 4 million board feet of logs out of Bear Brook.125 McNulty also had a drive that came through the lake. His wangan was at Sebec village about May 16 and it then moved to “the rips” down river.126

1913: Clarke and Robinson once again had the towing contracts. They hired the captains and boats of Fred Crockett and Otis Rogers of Sebec, and Ralph Green of Barnard.127 The first boom bag of the season came from Bucks Cove where John Perham, who cut 2 million board feet of logs for ATCo in Bowerbank township, landed his logs on the ice.128 The Smart drive from Davis Brook waited for towing in the Early landing area, the mouth of Big Wilson Stream. The A. Bradeen drive was from Bear Brook.129 Whether or not the Roscoe P. Lamson crew that peeled poplar on the stream was a part of this drive is unknown. C.E. Wingate might have also driven the brook as he had a crew peeling poplar cut on his Barnard lands at “the ridge.”130

1914: Logs entered the lake from Big Wilson and Ship Pond streams, and Bear Brook. The Moore family drove on Big Wilson Stream and an unknown lumberman cut near, hauled to, and drove from Long Pond.131 Annis had his crew blast the ice to get his drive of 3 million board feet of logs underway on Bear Brook about April 22.132 Someone also had logs in a boom at Beaver Brook in Newell Cove. Clarke and Robinson did the towing.134

1915: The boats towed the boom bags of L.C. Moore and Son (Andy) at Bucks Cove, E.H. Ladd at Newell Cove, and possibly Annis at Bucks Cove.135

1916: The towing of boom bags by Clarke’s boats began about May 1, and during the next 25 days windy weather interrupted the towing.136 Christopher H. Preble’s drive was out of Bear Brook by May 4.137 Another drive came into Bucks Cove from Long Pond.138 Ladd had boom bags at the head of Newell Cove from his cut on Beaver

120 The Piscataquis Observer, May 5, 1910
121 The Piscataquis Observer, May 4, May 11, and May 18, 1911
122 The Piscataquis Observer, May 23, 1912
123 The Piscataquis Observer, April 25, 1912
124 The Piscataquis Observer, April 11, 1912
125 The Piscataquis Observer, April 25 and May 2, 1912
126 The Piscataquis Observer, May 16, 1912
127 The Piscataquis Observer, May 8, 1913
128 The Piscataquis Observer, April 10, May 8, and May 15, 1913
129 The Piscataquis Observer, April 3 and May 8, 1913
130 The Piscataquis Observer, May 8, 1913
131 The Piscataquis Observer, May 7, 1914
132 The Piscataquis Observer, April 23, 1914
133 The Piscataquis Observer, May 14, 1914
134 The Piscataquis Observer, April 23, 1914
135 The Piscataquis Observer, March 25, April 29, and May 20, 1915
136 The Piscataquis Observer, May 4 and May 25, 1916
137 The Piscataquis Observer, April 27 and May 4, 1916
138 The Piscataquis Observer, May 11, 1916
Brook, and he had another bag at Bucks Cove. Moore and Son logged at an unknown location on the backside of Borestone Mountain, so he may have had his cut dumped on Lake Onawa and driven to Bucks Cove. A.P. Dow had logs that cleared the lake by May 25, but where he cut and the destination of his logs is unknown.

1917: Clarke and Crockett were busy towing boom bags in the later part of May. These boom bags might have included Ladd’s cut on Beaver Brook, where he had a crew of 75 men and 24 horses. A.A. Edgerly, who hauled 1.5 million board feet of logs into Newell Cove at Beaver Brook, might have done the hauling for Ladd. Sterns Lumber Company’s drive came down Wilson Stream. Ladd hauled 700 cord of hemlock bark to the train at Foxcroft village. Other boom bags probably include logs of Dow who cut in Bowerbank township. At the lower end of the lake or on the upper portion of Sebec River, the Ladd brothers hauled poplar to the waterway from Barnard township.

1918: The only known drives into the lake were on Wilson Stream; Dow and the Sterns Lumber Company.

1920: The only information in The Piscataquis Observer of April and May that suggests a log drive were two notes. The April 22 issue reported the drive through Willimantic Village would be late due to ice in the river. The May 20 issue noted that Captain Fred Crockett was towing on the lake with his boat Waban.

1921: Before the drive season Dow bought Fred Crockett’s boat Waban and then hired him to tow his cut of 440,000 board feet of logs from the mouth of Big Wilson Stream. A March 31 report implied a drive occurred on Davis Brook. Another drive came down Davis Brook in early April, but to whom it belonged is unknown.

1922: Clarke’s boats towed Ladd’s boom bags.

1924: Dow landed 1.5 million board feet of logs on the lake, cut another 750 cord of white birch and hauled it to the ATCo mill, and shipped 9,800 cords of poplar by rail to Oxford Paper Company and to S.D. Warren Company. He towed his boom bags with a motor-propelled bateau that he reported did a fine job even in rough water. At this time Dow and the Dowlin Lumber Company operations were in Milo village, but how much of the cut went to those mills is unknown.

1930s: The drive reporting of the 1930s included four different years. At Sebec village in 1930 Roy Dow and William Chase were getting pulpwood to the dam. Since the ice had gone out a day earlier, teamsters might have previously hauled it to the dam and stacked it on a landing. The destination for the pulpwood was not reported. The only drive reported in 1931 was Dowlin’s, which probably went to their Milo mill. Beginning in 1938 or 1939 the Maine Seaboard Paper Company began a yearly drive from Long Pond. These drives continued after being bought by St. Regis Pulp and Paper Company.


In 1946 the company bought a used towboat and continued to employ Lamson for towing boom bags. This boat burned in either 1946 or 1947, and St. Regis apparently hired other boats for towing. Albert Preble was one of those who towed in the last years of the St. Regis operations.

After WWII, when trucks and gas were more readily available, St. Regis river drives ended at Sebec village as opposed to continuing on to the Penobscot River. At some point in the late 1940s the company used a conveyor to take pulpwood from the lake just above the dam. Once the conveyor began operating, it only took a few days to pull all the pulpwood from the lake. Rodney Preble, whose great-grandfather, grandfather, and father all logged on the lake, remembered that the line of trucks some mornings was a mile long. In those last years St. Regis Paper Company used the recently abandoned Sebec village schoolhouse where the drive cook Ruben Lancaster prepared food for the crew. After school Rodney

139 The Piscataquis Observer, May 4, 1916
140 The Piscataquis Observer, May 25, 1916
141 The Piscataquis Observer, May 24, 1917
142 The Piscataquis Observer, March 29, 1917
143 The Piscataquis Observer, April 5, 1917
144 The Piscataquis Observer, March 31 and April 28, 1921
145 The Piscataquis Observer, May 11, 1922
146 The Piscataquis Observer, April 3, May 8, and May 22, 1924
147 The Piscataquis Observer, May 1, 1930
148 The Piscataquis Observer, April 9, 1931
149 The Piscataquis Observer, May 7, 1942
150 The Preble family logging in the Sebec Lake area spans five generations. Over the generations they cut in the townships of Sebec, Barnard, and Bowerbank. In more recent years they also cut for the Huber Corporation in Katahdin Iron Works township. Christopher H. Preble was born in Barnard in 1864. His son Clayton continued to log the Sebec Lake area. Albert Preble, Clayton’s son, continued the family tradition, lived in Sebec Village, and was the last of the family to tow boom bags across Sebec Lake.
hustled over to see him and Ruben always had a treat for him; it usually ruined his appetite for his mom’s supper. 1950s: The last of the yearly substantial drives down the lake were the St. Regis drives of 1950–1953. However, in the early 1950s Rodney Preble’s father, Albert, was still towing boom bags of logs he cut to Sebec village and Greeley Landing. His father, Albert, and Fred Cummings built the last tow boat Rodney’s father used; the 15-foot boat, outfitted with a 25-horsepower Johnson motor, towed boom bags of 10,000 to 15,000 board feet of pine saw-logs from Bucks Cove. Rodney’s father also used horse teams and crawler tractors to move the logs onto the ice. The pine was for the Merrill Lumber Company that at the time owned much of Bowerbank township; King’s Arrow Pine of Dover, Maine eventually bought it. By the time Rodney and his son began logging, they trucked the logs to market.

1957–1958: Perhaps the last towing of logs on the lake was in 1957 or 1958, when a young Jerry Packard towed pine logs from Tim’s Cove, 3 miles east of the mouth of Big Wilson Stream. The loggers hauled the pine onto the ice in the winter and in the spring at ice out he towed the boom bags with his family’s boat with a 16-horsepower motor that consumed two tanks of gas. The going was slow and he had to be careful to stay in the marked channel to get into Wilson Stream. On one trip he fell asleep when in the channel and woke when the boat ran into the rocks, fortunately with very little damage. Not far up the stream was a landing, where a mechanical device pulled them from the water and put them on a truck.

Logging activity between Sebec Lake and the head of Long Pond

The communities

Only three small clusters of inhabitants formed between the mouth of Ship Pond Stream and the head of Long Pond, its headwaters. The oldest, mid-1820s, was on Long Pond Stream a short distance above the head of Lake Onawa. Captain Jordan cleared a landing on Lake Onawa at the west corner of its north end in 1822. To the west of that landing he did some land clearing for the next couple of years and Samuel Bodfish joined him in that endeavor. Jordan moved to the valley in 1825, but apparently did not stay long. Bodfish followed with his family about 1830; perhaps his timing was a result of the 1825 fire that burned through this area. No contingent of families ever joined the Bodfishes, who lived in the valley until 1951.

About 1870 the Howard Slate Company began operating its mine on the lower end of Ship Pond Stream, land known as The Quarry Tract. The company constructed a 1.5 mile horse-drawn four-foot gauge tram that started on the shore of Sebec Lake near the mouth of Ship Pond Stream and went north to the quarry. The community structures at the quarry included a boarding house (“hotel”), several residences, grocery store, and blacksmith shop; all made out of logs. The company employed 60 men. Quarrymen loaded the trams that horse teams hauled to Sebec Lake at Bucks Cove where a crew loaded slate onto a steamboat that took it to Sebec village. From here another team hauled it to the railroad. The company ran for ten years, closing in 1880.

When the east-west running Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) crossed below the southeastern end of Lake Onawa in 1889, the company located a section crew headquarters at the site, and three miles to the west put in Bodfish siding on the ridge above Bodfish Intervale. A small community that became known as Onawa began to form around the section headquarters. The community supported logging operations, but it never developed as a major logging hub.

Logging infrastructure

Access to the waterway was via two roads. Samuel Bodfish cut the first tote road from Monson to Bodfish Intervale (12 miles). It ended at his landing on Long Pond Stream less than a mile above Lake Onawa. This was the major supply route for lumbermen cutting between Onawa dam and Long Pond through the end of

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151 The Piscataquis Observer, May 28, 1953 This was the last drive Jerry Packard remembered.
152 conversation with Jerry Packard
153 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, May 29, 1871 In 1870 the legislature approved two charters, Ship Pond Stream Navigation Company and the Ship Pond Valley Railroad, both of which the Howard Slate Company requested. These two companies never took any action. The railway company was to perhaps replace the tramway. The navigation company was to reform Ship Pond Stream as a canal with locks, presumably to facilitate transportation of slate to Sebec Lake.
of the area’s log driving era. From 1939 through 1953 Maine Seaboard Paper Company and its successor, St. Regis Paper Company, used the road to bring in supplies for operations on Long Pond, Long Pond Stream, and the south side of Barren Mountain.

The other major route started at lower Greeley Falls on Big Wilson Stream near the head of Sebec Lake.\(^{155}\) The road might have been a natural evolution as loggers cut their way upstream, but it was in place by 1853 when a crew built the dam. Its use continued through the log-driving era. From the falls the road went north, skirted west of the swamps near the lower portion of Ship Pond Stream, and then ran along its western edge to just below the lake, where it crossed to the other Wil-limantic Thread Company birch mill. At some point, someone extended the road to the saddle between Barren and Benson mountains and across the mountainside to the gap between Barren and Fourth mountains, where it dropped off the mountain, ending at the midpoint of Long Pond’s south shore east of First Narrows and at a lumber camp.\(^{156}\) This extension, which became known as Judkin’s Road, was 7 miles long, compared to 14 miles via the waterway. The horses and men of the logging operations on Long Pond probably used this route. It was overgrown in 1934, but clearly visible,\(^{157}\) which suggested it was last used in the 1920s.

The first dam at the foot of Lake Onawa might have been the one constructed in 1853, when the Maine state legislature chartered the Ship Pond Stream and Dam Company. This charter allowed for dams and improvements only on Ship Pond Stream. In 1868 the dam was in poor condition.\(^{158}\) What improvements may have taken place between 1853 and 1895 are unknown. No lumberman made a request for toll increases during this time period and that indicated limited use.

Beginning in 1895 lumbermen had a renewed interest in improving driving on the drainage. That year the legislature chartered the Long Pond Dam Company for operations between Long Pond and Lake Onawa. The company either built or rebuilt dams at the foot of Long Pond and along the stream, and removed obstacles. In 1897 the legislature amended the charter to include the dam at the outlet of Lake Onawa. The company could fix the Onawa dam so as to support log driving, but not take away its function in support of manufacturing. A similar condition held for Slugundy Falls on Long Pond Stream. The legislature approved a new toll for pulpwood and reissued the charter in 1901 to the Long Pond Improvement Company that bought out Long Pond Dam Company.

The new company had the rights to make any stream improvements, build sluices and more dams, but it could not increase the head of the Lake Onawa dam. In 1922 the old dam at Long Pond was in poor condition and had not been used for some time.\(^{159}\) A report of the township in 1927 indicated that the foot of Long Pond had two dams.\(^{160}\) The one at the outlet had a seven-foot head and two 5.5-foot gates, and the one below that at the narrows had a 7.5-foot head and two 5.5 foot gates. The dams needed spilling and gravel. The report indicated Long Pond and Long Pond Stream were drivable for both long logs and pulpwood, and that Vaughn Stream’s lower 2.5-miles was drivable for pulpwood, if improved.\(^{161}\) Whether or not a crew made improvements is unknown. By 1934 a dam that had been at the head

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155 Dorothy A. Blanchard, *Old Sebec Lake* (Dover, NH: Arcadia Publications, 1997)
156 Guide to the Appalachian Trail in Maine 1934, inserted map
157 Guide to the Appalachian Trail in Maine 1934
158 Walter Wells, *The Water Power of Maine* (Sprague, Owen, and Nash: Printers to the state, 1869)
159 Reports of Exploration of TWP8 R10 NWP (Bowdoin College Grant West), Piscataquis County, 1922; available at Maine State Archives
160 Reports of Exploration of TWP8 R10 NWP (Bowdoin College Grant West), Piscataquis County, 1927; available at Maine State Archives
161 Reports of Exploration of TWP8 R10 NWP (Bowdoin College Grant West), Piscataquis County, 1922 and 1927; available at Maine State Archives
of Slugundy Falls had washed out, as had a sluice that channeled the water down along the cliffside on the west side of the stream.

This drainage area had a number of mills that operated for short periods of time. The earliest was a post-1880 Willimantic Thread Company birch mill east of the Lake Onawa dam; its years of operation are unknown. Immediately west of Lake Onawa at Greenwood Pond in 1891 W.H. Jackson, with a crew of 25 to 30 men, used his steam mill to cut 500,000 board feet of birch bars for Willimantic Thread Company; when the mill originally opened and closed is undiscovered, but it does not appear on the 1882 Colby maps. The Lake Onawa dam was the site of a box mill that operated in the 1920s. Its mill yard and a field were on the east side of the lake above the dam. Teamsters hauled the boxes from the mill to the Onawa train station for shipping by railroad. Another sawmill was on Vaughn Stream just above its mouth at Long Pond Stream; it was gone by 1934. East of the Lake Onawa dam on the west side of Benson Pond was the Pride shoe block mill from c.1928 to the early 1930s. Advance Bag and Paper Company had a mill, perhaps steam-powered, on Wilbur Brook, whose mouth is a third of a mile up Vaughn Stream from Long Pond Stream. The mill was probably in place by 1942 and perhaps no earlier than 1938. The mill still operated in 1953, but when it closed prior to 1959 is undiscovered. What the mill sawed is unknown, but presumably it was more economical to mill the logs on location as opposed to hauling logs. Truckers probably took the milled wood to Bodfish siding or Monson Junction.

The Pride mill operation that linked Benson Pond, Bodfish landing, and Upper Abbot village ran nearly year-round, and used railroad services, truck drivers, tractor drivers, teamsters, and boatmen. Supplies for the men, who lived in the camp at the mill, came by train to Upper Abbot village, where truckers or teamsters picked them up and took them to Bodfish Intervale. A tractor hauled them to Bodfish landing; here a crew loaded them in two large canoes for the lake crossing. Teamsters hauled the supplies to the mill and brought in the logs.

His steam-powered mill, employing 20–30 men, cut shoe blocks from maple trees, using only the butts and trunks with a minimum 16 inches in diameter (probably a product of the 1825 fire). Boatmen took the blocks to the west end of Benson Pond, where teamsters hauled the blocks to Lake Onawa. Men loaded the blocks on two scows and towed them to Bodfish landing on Long Pond Stream. One of the scows had a 12–horsepower Johnson outboard and canoe paddlers towed the other. The crew off-loaded them onto sleds that a tractor towed to Bodfish’s, where trucks took them to Pride’s drying kilns in Abbot village. As a result of the depression, he ceased operations in the early 1930s and apparently left his hauling tractors behind. In the 1930s Henry D.M. Scherrerd Jr. used to pass by an abandoned hauler on the old trail from the Bodfish Valley car park to Lake Onawa.

Logging and driving activity

When logging in this section first commenced is a matter of speculation. In 1830 the Bodfishes found much of the valley below the junction of Long Pond and

162 Guide to the Appalachian Trail in Maine 1934, p.79
163 a picture from the Bert Call Collection; available at University of Maine Raymond Fogler Library Special Collections
164 This mill appears on an old but undated “Plantation Elliottsville” map; available at James W. Sewall Company archives
165 The Industrial Journal, February 6, 1891
166 Guide to the Appalachian Trail in Maine 1934, p.80
168 K. C. Bennett, Vaughn’s Elliottsville, Guilford Public Library; two large binders of materials used in writing the book.
Vaughn streams burned by the 1825 fire. The softwood that remained was far from a market. Any new growth would not have been mature enough until about 1870. However, the 1853 dam at Lake Onawa suggests logging activity, but the condition of the dam in the ensuing years implies little use. The earliest discovered logging activity was that of Ward Scripture in 1872; his crew cut at an unknown location in the Long Pond and Long Pond Stream area and drove it to market through Lake Onawa. During this early era Ship Pond Lumber Company formed, bought land around the lake and on Borestone Mountain, where loggers cut for the last time in 1889. Given the softwood logging records involving the mountain, it appears the 1825 fire left at least parts of the mountain unburned.

At an unknown early time loggers came to harvest yellow birch for the saw-log and its knee, the curved part of the tree where it goes into the ground. These trees probably grew into the 1825 burn area along with the white birch (birch) that the Willimantic Thread Company began harvesting in 1879. The drive crew lashed the yellow birch knees and logs to rafts of softwood saw-logs and drove them down Ship Pond Stream to the Bangor and Brewer ship lumber market. Ship builders used yellow birch for keels and framing below the load water level, but not commonly for knees, which were the braces supporting the keel, masts, and framing.

Substantial logging in this drainage began in the 1890s, when a variety of trees matured in the 1825 burn. The drives on Ship Pond Stream in 1894 and 1895 were of poplar for Boston Excelsior mill in Milo village. Almond H. Gould and J.C. Dean cut and peeled 3,235 cords of poplar and drove it for 75 cents a cord, and a year later in 1895 contracted for 2,000 cords. The loggers, who cut on the Quarry Tract of the Howard Slate Company, landed the logs on the lower half of Ship Pond Stream. The two drives of 1896 amounted to nearly 10 million board feet of logs. This was the largest cut in the last 10 to 15 years, as reported by The Piscataquis Observer on April 16. One drive, estimated at 8 million board feet of logs, was for the Howland Pulp and Paper Company mill.

A portion of these logs came down Davis Brook into Big Wilson Stream. Spencer’s drive of 2 million board feet of logs, cut at some unknown location, went down Ship Pond Stream. Perhaps he had the active lumber camp at about the mid-point of Long Pond Stream. His drive, destined for the Old Town pulp and paper mill, reached Milo village by May 16. The Bangor Daily Whig and Courier of Saturday, May 15, 1897 reported that the ice went out of Lake Onawa about May 8 and drivers sluiced the logs within the week. A drive-crew bateau with the wagon swamped in the river and the drivers lost a lot of material. This implies that the drive was softwood or poplar and may have been landed on the lake or driven to the lake at ice out on Long Pond Stream. In 1898 A.J. Weymouth and Sons cut 4,000 cords of poplar along the lower end of Long Pond Stream. That same year the Corry brothers from Lagrange cut 3,000 cords of birch on the lake, probably for the Willimantic Thread Company.

The drainage experienced a logging operation nearly every other year during the first decade of the 1900s. In 1901 Thomas Gilbert either drove his logs out of Ship Pond Stream into Bucks Cove or hauled them from a landing in Bowerbank township to the cove. Gilbert was back in 1903 when he cut and drove 750,000 board feet of logs on Ship Pond Stream. During the winter of 1905 Lancaster and Sawyer had lumber camps on Ship Pond Stream 9 miles from Packard landing. A drive in 1909 included a million board feet of logs cut by a Gilbert crew on Lake Onawa. Wiles and Pfunter landed another 1.5 million board feet of logs on Ship Pond Stream.

The intensity of the logging picked up between 1910 and 1917. In 1910 Sawyer drove Ship Pond Stream, but where he had landed the cut is unknown. Sometime between 1910 and 1914 loggers cut for at least two years in the southwest-most corner of T7R10 N.W.P. and hauled to Long Pond. In 1912 and unknown prior years, loggers operating in the southern half of the west-

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170 The Piscataquis Observer, April 25, 1895


172 The Piscataquis Observer, April 16 and May 14, 1896

173 The Maine Sportsman, May 1896, p.12

174 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, September 13, 1898

175 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, September 13, 1898

176 The Piscataquis Observer, May 16, 1901

177 The Piscataquis Observer, April 2, 1903

178 Daily Kennebec Journal, April 4, 1905

179 The Piscataquis Observer, April 15, 1909

180 The Piscataquis Observer, May 5, 1910

181 Reports of Exploration of TWP8 R10 N.W.P (Bowdoin College Grant West), Piscataquis County, 1922 and 1927; available at Maine State Archives
ern five-eighths of T8R10 N.W.P. hauled their logs to either a tributary that fed into Long Pond Stream or to the stream.\textsuperscript{182} That same year James McNulty probably drove a large volume of logs on Ship Pond Stream.\textsuperscript{183} The lumbermen in 1914 cut pulpwood at the southeast corner of Bowdoin College Grant West and hauled it to and drove it from Long Pond. For the 1915 season L.C. Moore and Son (Andy) drove their cut from Lake Onawa on Ship Pond Stream and it reached Sebec Lake on May 13.\textsuperscript{184} A week later The Piscataquis Observer reported that drive boss William Annis was at Cowyard Falls with his drive. In 1916 a drive came into Bucks Cove from Long Pond.\textsuperscript{185} Moore and Son logged at an unknown location on the backside of Borestone Mountain so he might have had his cut dumped on Lake Onawa and driven to Bucks Cove.

Between c.1917 and 1922 loggers cut to salvage the spruce budworm infestation in the southern portion of the eastern three-eighths of T8R10 N.W.P. and drove it out through Long Pond.\textsuperscript{186} This may have been the last time drivers used the dam prior to an exploration of the township in 1922. Apparently the dam remained unimproved through 1927.\textsuperscript{187}

The salvage operation and the large and consistent logging operations beginning in 1894 left few mature trees for harvesting after 1922, and that is reflected in the infrequent and scattered cutting until 1939. In 1931 Drew, of the Bodfish Valley farm, had a small crew that cut 650 cords of pulpwood, 175 cords of hardwood and 1,200 cedar railroad ties. He hauled everything to the Bodfish train siding.\textsuperscript{188} The Piscataquis Observer of May 17, 1934 reported Drew’s activity to be like that in 1931.

Between 1939 and 1953 Maine Seaboard Paper Company and its successor, St. Regis Paper Company, conducted extensive pulpwood cutting operations on the north side of the Barren Chairback Range.\textsuperscript{189} The company began its work at East Chairback Pond and worked west. This was a huge operation compared to any previous cutting. Supplies came in from Monson through Bodfish Intervale, up along Long Pond Stream, where a crew built a new road easterly to their first main logging camp, which was on West Chairback Brook well below West Chairback Pond. In general the company’s crews cut from Long Pond to the Barren-Chairback ridgeline. When the company closed the camp at West Chairback Stream, a crew moved it to the south shore of Long Pond just east of the first narrows and behind the island. As cutting moved farther west the main camp moved to where the main road along Long Pond Stream crossed Mink Brook. Another main camp was in Bodfish Intervale.

At some point, probably in the early 1950s, St. Regis had a lumber camp at the head of Lake Onawa’s Duck Cove, which is north of the outlet on the south end of the lake. Before St. Regis moved in, the site had a small camp that cut “sleepers,” a logger’s term for railroad ties. The company sited this camp for cutting the south slopes of Barren Mountain, where loggers were still using a large number of horses.\textsuperscript{190} One horse barn was in a small bowl about half-way up the mountain at the top of the 2,580-foot log sluice and housed the horses hauling logs from the upper mountain to the top of the sluice. It followed what the locals call Ricker Brook, that empties into the swampy area near the northeast corner of the lake. The loggers made the sluice with logs butted end-to-end, with no intention of using water. It was so steep that a braking system was needed. Suspended at intervals above the sluice were logs that the descending logs hit, slowing their travel. The sluice’s bottom end was high, (50–60 ft.) above the last waterfall, and that allowed a huge pile of logs to collect at the bottom. Loggers then had to transport them about a half-mile over flat ground to the lake. The crew preferred to sluice on rainy days; the rain reduced friction and prevented overheating and the risk of fire caused by friction. On dry days some local folks would walk up the sluice. At the end of the sluice-way’s use, some of the logs on the track were worn almost through. Oscar Partinen, a logger at the time, said that when sticks were coming down the sluice and jetti-

\textsuperscript{182} Reports of Exploration of TWP8 R10 NWP (Bowdoin College Grant West), Piscataquis County, 1922 and 1927; available at Maine State Archives
\textsuperscript{183} The Piscataquis Observer, May 16, 1912
\textsuperscript{184} The Piscataquis Observer, March 25, and May 13, 1915
\textsuperscript{185} The Piscataquis Observer, May 11, 1916
\textsuperscript{186} Reports of Exploration of TWP8 R10 NWP (Bowdoin College Grant West), Piscataquis County, 1922 and 1927; available at Maine State Archives
\textsuperscript{187} Reports of Exploration of TWP8 R10 NWP (Bowdoin College Grant West), Piscataquis County, 1922 and 1927; available at Maine State Archives
\textsuperscript{188} The Piscataquis Observer, May 7, 1931
\textsuperscript{189} Guide to the Appalachian Trail in Maine, 1942, 1953 and their supplements
\textsuperscript{190} conversation with Jerry Packard, Bill Stoner, and T. Driscoll
soning off the end, each one made the noise of a cannon shot when landing in the pile of logs.\textsuperscript{191}

The dam at the outlet of Lake Onawa remained critical to the St. Regis operation through the end of its cutting operations in this drainage, the last one being in 1953.\textsuperscript{192} High water damaged the dam to the degree that it had to undergo repairs prior to the drive in 1947.\textsuperscript{193} The company had to repair the dam again before the 1953 drive.\textsuperscript{194}

Crews drove the logs through the waterways to Bangor until about 1947, when St. Regis ended the drive at the Sebec Lake dam by taking the logs out of the water with a conveyor and loading them on trucks.

**Drive strategies**

**On Long Pond**

No descriptive information on how log drivers managed their work on Long Pond seems to exist, but their probable methods can be surmised. James Draper, who has had a camp at the pond since 1965, provided some clues. He found an old ocean-sailing vessel’s capstan in the woods on the south shore near the logging camp at the east end of the pond, discovered the remains of the drive boat *Lillian* in the woods close to the shore, and has seen pictures of pulpwood stacks on the ice at the east end of the pond.

Several features of the pond complicated boom bag towing and dictated the size of the booms towed. The pond’s outlet narrows to about 200 feet wide and extends 1700 feet to the first dam. Getting logs down this gut without getting the towing mechanism trapped would have been difficult. At about the midpoint of the lake are three narrows ranging from 160 feet to 270 feet wide and spanning a distance of seven-tenths of a mile. The two smallest have rocks that drivers did not remove or minimize during the log drive era. The dam with a full 7.5-foot head must have flooded out the rocks in order for a crew to tow the pulpwood piled on the ice at the pond’s east end.

Loggers used a headworks to tow logs prior to the Seaboard operations that used motorized bateaux and the small boats, like the one Draper found. The drivers turned the headworks’ capstan Draper found with four arms, suggesting that the boom bags were relatively small. A bag of about 250,000 board feet of logs would have been able to move through the narrows.\textsuperscript{195} Log drivers might have used multiple headworks, towing at the same time, so as to get the drive out of the lake on the water available.

If the loggers used the typical and often-used 2-mile hauling distance for horses, then anything they cut within 2 miles of the dam, they hauled across the ice to it. From the dam such an arc would stretch out to the Wilder Ponds, to the middle of the lake beyond the First Narrows, and to everything sloped to the pond’s north side west of the First Narrows. A cut at the east end of the pond was about 3.4 miles from the dam.

The lumbermen had several advantages by hauling to the dam. They could drive the stream as soon as the ice was out and not have to wait additional days for the ice to leave the pond. As soon as the ice was off the stream, they blasted the ice behind the dam to release the logs piled on the ice. This factor was especially important in this watershed that relied not only on snowmelt, but also spring rain to complete drives.\textsuperscript{196}

Hauling as much as possible to the dam also meant the lumbermen simplified the movement of logs through the 1,700-foot gut. The lumbermen might have had a crew line the gut with a log boom. When sluicing started in the spring a crew would use a headworks at the dam to pull the boom and the logs within it to the dam as other drivers sluiced them.

By the time Maine Seaboard Paper Company came to the pond to harvest pulpwood in 1939 tractors were beginning to do some hauling, but whether or not they did in this area is unknown.

**On Long Pond Stream**

The position of the dam at the foot of the gut was strategic. Below the dam was another four-tenths mile of boggy gut that was a few feet lower in elevation than the main pond. The open gates of the first dam pushed the logs through the next gut, perhaps with some help of drivers in bateaux or walking the boom logs, to the second dam that caught the released water and re-released it as drivers sluiced the logs through that dam.\textsuperscript{197} Whether or not the second dam was key to post-1938 drives...

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\textsuperscript{191} correspondence with James Draper
\textsuperscript{192} The last drive reported in *The Piscataquis Observer* was in 1953.
\textsuperscript{193} *The Piscataquis Observer*, May 15, 1947
\textsuperscript{194} *The Piscataquis Observer*, May 7, 1953
\textsuperscript{195} Some headworks had six or even eight arms.
\textsuperscript{196} Details are in chapter two.
\textsuperscript{197} Remains of both dams are evident in the current landscape.
of pulpwood is unknown. Pulpwood drives needed less water than those of long logs.

Below the second dam Long Pond Stream twists and turns in its rocky bed, passes through Slugundy Falls at 3.5 miles and reaches the mouth of Vaughn Brook at 5.13 miles. For the last 2.86-miles the streambed is sandy and meanders lazily through Bodfish Intervale to Lake Onawa.

The dam companies made at least two major stream improvements and probably others. Exactly what year a crew built the dam at the head of Slugundy Falls is unknown, but it may have been built under the 1895 charter when logging activity increased on the stream. The site would have been a probable jamming site if lots of logs were on the stream. The dam had a sluice, in part suspended from the west side cliff on the stream in order to bypass a narrow gorge and falls. The loggers did some stream clearing given that the stream is currently reasonably clear of large rock obstructions. The drive crew set side booms to keep the logs and pulpwood in the main current where it split to go around islands. The Slugundy dam and sluice were no longer needed when the post-1938 pulpwood drives began.

When the drive was ready to leave Long Pond, the drive boss positioned his men between the pond and Lake Onawa. The key locations for drive camps included Long Pond outlet, Slugundy Falls, and some place in Bodfish Intervale near Lake Onawa. Given the many tight corners and the narrowness of the stream, it is likely that he positioned his men the full length of the stream to keep jams from forming. The crew positioned at the head of Lake Onawa boomed the logs.

Whether or not lumbermen drove any logs into Long Pond Stream from Wilder, Mink, or Vaughn brooks is unknown. Logs cut along Wilder or Mink brooks were within hauling distance of the stream. The lower 2.5 miles of Vaughn Brook was drivable for pulpwood with improvements, but whether or not any were made is unknown.

Another option for either saw-log or pulpwood operations was to have teamsters or tractors or trucks haul the wood and dump it on Lake Onawa. Whether or not this ever happened is neither revealed in discovered documents nor recollected by lake residents.

On Lake Onawa

As the drive entered Lake Onawa, the plan was to collect all the logs at the dam before moving down Ship Pond Stream. This strategy minimized the number of needed boom logs. In preparation for the logs entering the lake, the drivers placed a boom bag at the mouth of the stream. Once logs filled the bag to the desired size, a crew replaced it with an empty bag, and towed the full one to the dam. If the speed of filling bags exceeded the rate of towing, then the crew towed the full bag into the protective cove to the north. The 2.7 miles across the lake to the dam was in a southeastern direction, an advantage in that the predominant breeze is generally from the north and west.
At the dam the drivers took several sequential steps. They stretched a 370-foot boom between the opposite points near the dam. As the towed boom bag approached the boom a crew opened it to let the boom bag move in. They closed the boom, opened and emptied the boom bag and returned up the lake for a refill. The process repeated itself until all the logs were between the boom and the dam.

A headworks towed either the log rafts or boom bags, through about 1915. The lake probably did not have a towboat before 1900 given the lack of summer camp owners. After 1915 private motorized craft were on the lake and residents recalled that Raymond Perry towed boom bags. The large operations of Seaboard and St. Regis from 1939 to 1953 probably used some kind of motorized craft.

**On Ship Pond Stream**

Ship Pond Stream (5.4 miles long) has two major falls, some snake-like streambed sections, and lacks long sections with steep banks and a streambed full of large rocks. Canoeists and kayakers classify the stream between the two falls as class I-III. Some early loggers used bateaux to bring their wangan down river from the Onawa dam. Whether the drivers had dams on any of the three brooks (Crocket, Johnson, Buttermilk) entering the stream, so they could release water to influence the flow in Ship Pond Stream, is unknown.

The charters for driving the stream allowed for stream improvements. No documentation of what river drivers made for improvements is available. The most likely jamming sites, other than the sharp corners, were the three falls. At Bucks Falls (two-tenths of a mile from Sebec Lake) some improvement activity took place. Rocks below the falls might have been moved to clear a channel. Another seven-tenths of a mile upstream is the foot of a double oxbow that has a straight defined channel that bypasses the two loops, but whether or not it was man-made is unknown. Another 1.6 miles upstream is Cowyard Falls and a new road crossing; the old road crossed much farther upstream. About four-tenths of a mile above the falls is an unnamed falls that is the shape of a dam slip. The stream has an island at 4.7 miles where a side dam or side boom might have been advantageous. Jerry Packard, who grew up and continues to live in the area, has never found evidence of dams or sluices on the stream.

The drive camps were at the foot of Lake Onawa, Cowyard Falls (mid-point of the stream), and perhaps at Bucks Falls near the outlet. At the foot of Lake Onawa the drive boss may have used Young and Buxton Camps or one of the other structures of public accommodations near the Onawa train station. Those working at Bucks Cove may have stayed in the Packard’s boarding house near the mouth of Wilson Stream, as they did some years on the Big Wilson Stream drive. If the drive boss wanted to minimize camps, then the main camp would have been at Cowyard Falls. Cookees could have easily delivered the two meals served away from camp each day to men working any place on the stream. On other drives some cookees traveled as many as 6 miles to serve a meal.

**Logging activity between the mouth of Big Wilson Stream at Sebec Lake and Upper Wilson Pond**

Big Wilson Stream drains a substantial uninhabited wilderness. The stream starts at the outlet of Lower Wilson Pond, flows easterly for 18.9 miles, and ends at the west end of Sebec Lake. At 3.6 miles above Sebec Lake on the stream is the mouth of 6.6-mile-long Davis Brook, which empties Davis Pond at the northwest corner of Guilford township. Another 6.2 miles above the mouth of Davis Brook is the confluence of Little Wilson Stream, whose headwaters are in the southeast quadrant of Shirley township, 8.3 miles upstream.

Five villages formed around the drainages waterpower sources. Willimantic village was on Big Wilson Stream 4 miles above Sebec Lake. The first Greenville community opened on the plateau to the west of Lower Wilson Pond. The North Guilford village developed around the mill and outlet of Davis Pond. Shirley Corner was immediately west of the active mill on the headwaters of Little Wilson Stream. At the 4.6 mile mark on Little Wilson Stream a tiny community developed around the Savage mill, where the first stage road to Greenville crossed the stream. With the exception of the Savage mill community, which families abandoned by 1848, the land encircling these villages and the west end of Sebec Lake was the domain of loggers.

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198 K.C. Bennett, *Vaughn’s Elliottsville*, Guilford Public Library; two large binders of materials used in writing the book
199 conversation with Jerry Packard
200 conversation with Jerry Packard
201 conversation with Jerry Packard
Loggers conducted two different types of logging operations in this area. The 1825 fire burned from Sebec Lake west up Big Wilson Stream valley to some place between Davis and Little Wilson streams. The loggers reentered this area after 1875 to cut birch and poplar. Loggers on Little Wilson Stream and on Big Wilson Stream between Big Wilson Falls and the Wilson ponds, an unburned area, cut pine and spruce, and pulpwood.

In the early 1800s settlers moved into the area near Big Wilson Falls and the village eventually became known as Willimantic. The Vaughn family put up a sawmill and a clapboard mill, near the current bridge. A gristmill was farther upstream. The area turned out to have poor farmland, so farmers cut off the trees, could not sell the land, and by 1848 abandoned their property, and Vaughn’s mills decayed. Sawyer rebuilt a mill ten years later in 1858 and began cutting shingles.

At some date prior to 1881 I.G. Williams either built or took over a sawmill not located at one of the three pitches of Greenwood Falls, now named Toby Falls, but below them and still such a distance from Sebec Lake that a drive needed high water to reach the lake. The mill was probably at Big Wilson Falls. Drive crews and teamsters brought in his logs that included birch and pine through at least 1897. Williams planned to build a steam mill near his current sawmill in 1885, but whether or not he did is unknown. In 1891 the mill, which was also cutting spool bars that the men finished cutting by April 30, had only a small amount of long logs, so the mill did not operate during the summer. He may have ceased operations sometime before 1906 when R.M. and H.C. Floyd built a steam mill to saw all kinds of lumber, with a specialty being hardwood. A mill of some type was still sawing birch or other hardwood in 1912 when teamsters finished the hauling by March 21.

Downstream in 1879 the Willimantic Thread Company built a birch mill on the north side of Big Wilson Stream at lower G Creeley Falls. The company bought 173 acres from which crews cut birch. The mill complex included drying sheds, splitters, and shops. The mill workers lived on the south side of the stream at first, but later moved to the north side and west of the mill. Typically, 50 men worked at the mill in the spring when the sawing operation ran 24 hours per day until they finished sawing the birch, generally by June 1.

The mill manufactured just spool bars (also called “spool splits”) until 1886, when the spool turning operation started. Company teamsters, using 10 teams of horses in 1886, hauled the product 14 miles to the train station in Upper Abbot village. Unless the snow was deep, a team was four horses. Sometimes shipments occurred after ice out at Sebec Lake and those went by steamboat to Blethen Landing, where teamsters hauled to the Dover village train siding. In 1898 the company merged with ATCo and it closed the Willimantic mill in 1902. William Early bought ATCo’s boarding house, mill, office building, and farm in 1906, and cut spool bars at the site until 1925.

The company required a substantial amount of birch each year. Some of it came from its tract and the balance was from other loggers working within a hauling distance of the mill. In 1883 the total hauled was 4,000 cords as cut by a total of 250 men. To meet part of its needed cordage in 1891, the company hired W.H. Jackson of Monson to cut and split out at his steam mill on Greenwood Pond 500,000 board feet of spool bars, and haul them to the mill. In other years David Greeley’s mill at Blethen Landing had a similar contract.

Not all birch cut on Wilson Stream went to one of the stream’s mills. In 1885 a Parker and Bailey crew cut 1,000 cords of birch on the lower end of Big Wilson Stream for the Milo birch mill.

At North Guilford the waterpower source at the outlet of Davis Pond attracted early settlers. They endured the fire of 1825, but many lost their wood lots. The fire left islands of unburned trees, enough to keep the mill

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202 Amasa Loring, History of Piscataquis County, Maine: From its Earliest Settlement to 1880 (Portland, ME; Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
203 a conclusion based on log drive information
204 George J. Varney, Gazetteer of the State of Maine (Boston: B.B. Russell, 1881)
205 The Piscataquis Observer, March 19, 1885
206 The Piscataquis Observer, May 7, 1885
207 The Piscataquis Observer, April 30, 1891
208 The Piscataquis Observer, May 3, 1906
209 The Piscataquis Observer, March 21, 1912
210 The Piscataquis Observer, April 8, 1886
211 The Piscataquis Observer, May 31, 1883
212 Dorothy Blanchard, Old Sebec Lake (Dover, NH: Arcadia Publications, 1997)
213 The Piscataquis Observer, May 24, 1906 Early also used the site as a sporting camp.
214 The Piscataquis Observer, March 29, April 5, April 12, 1883
215 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, January 31, 1891
216 The Piscataquis Observer, April 16, 1885
open and meet the local needs. By the 1880s the birch in the burn had matured and lot owners cut and hauled a great deal of it to the mill. By 1912 the mill was also cutting softwood. About 12 years later the mill closed, but in the late 1920s a toothpick manufacturer moved in and operated until the end of 1941. The poplars, which also grew in the burn bordering the stream, were valuable. Loggers cut and drove them down Davis Brook to Sebec Lake and on down the waterway to the excelsior mill in Milo, and eventually the paper mill at Howland.217

The Savage mill community had a typical beginning. Settlers who were farmers found what they thought could become good farmland near a waterpower source, Little Wilson Stream. Nelson Savage, one of the farmers, built a sawmill to meet their needs and the others began clearing their land, with the mill sawing the logs. They soon discovered that the land was poor for farming and in order to make ends meet they kept cutting off the trees, which the mill bought, sawed to clapboard length, and drove them down the stream to market. Savage’s experience in driving the stream was one of frustration. Many of the cuts split on the 80-foot drop at Little Wilson Stream Falls.218 By 1848 the families had stripped their land of merchantable trees and abandoned it. The mill closed and no one ever returned to farm or open a mill.

The Shirley Corner mill community on the headwaters of Little Wilson Stream sawed for the community. By 1878 John Stacy was running what was then called Sprague’s mills (clapboards and shingles), but whether or not it was meeting any more than local needs is unknown. When the railroad reached East Shirley Mills in 1884, 2 miles to the west, the mill shipped lumber.219 Stacy’s family kept the mill running with George Stacy as the boss through about 1903.220

The original Greenville community was on fine farmland above Lower Wilson Pond, but the economic opportunities at the foot of Moosehead Lake created the village center, and the outlet of Lower Wilson Pond never developed as a major mill site. It was the site of the community’s 1829 sawmill and a year later a gristmill, both considered a necessity in a rural community. In 1848 Wilson Pond had a sawmill on an unnamed inlet. Only 3 miles separated Lower and Upper Wilson ponds from Moosehead Lake, but that close proximity apparently did not encourage loggers cutting in the Wilson ponds area to haul logs to Moosehead Lake.

The Wilson ponds and the upper reaches of Big Wilson Stream had few loggers until the early 1890s. One reason was that the cutting area that sloped to the ponds was small even though the ponds are 5.6 miles from end to end. The middle of the Lower pond is 21.6 miles from the head of Sebec Lake with another 69 miles to Old Town on the Penobscot River. The first 7 miles of stream is in a deep, steep-sided ravine that would have made work challenging for loggers working above the ravine and rolling logs into it to reach the stream. This area was the last for loggers to move into on the Piscataquis watershed.

Infrastructure

The drainage’s first dams included Vaughn’s at Big Wilson Falls in Willimantic village, Savage on Little Wilson Stream, and one at the outlet of Little Wilson Pond. The few others that existed on Big Wilson Stream between the three Toby Falls and Sebec Lake were not the dams of lumbermen seeking to enhance a log drive. At Lower Wilson Pond a lumberman probably built the dam that was in place by 1868; it had a 7-foot head that could be increased by 3 feet.221

The first lumbermen to seek legislative approval to alter a stream with a dam or other means acted in 1883 and the Maine state legislature approved their charter. The Little Wilson Falls and Dam Company charter enabled the company to make any improvements (blasting, sluices, dams) to get long logs over 80-foot high Little Wilson Falls. In 1887–1888 the legislature amended the charter to include tolls for all logs but clapboard cuts. Exactly what improvements the company made is unknown, but since the legislature allowed tolls beginning in 1887–1888 the company made some improvements.

In 1893–1894 a group of men formed and received a charter for the Wilson Stream Dam Company. It allowed

217 More information on the North Guilford mill is available in chapter one.
218 Amasa Loring, History of Piscataquis County, ME: From its Earliest Settlement to 1880 (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
219 Amasa Loring, History of Piscataquis County, ME: From its Earliest Settlement to 1880 (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
220 The Maine Register, State Year-book and Legislative Manuals’ last year of inclusion of the mills was 1903. A possible reason for closing the mill was that in 1902 George W. Stacy bought the Shirley Lumber Company, with a saw mill at the foot of East Shirley Bog a few miles to the east and directly on the B&A. George Stacy might have been a member of the John Stacy family.
221 Walter Wells, The Water Power of Maine (Sprague, Owen, and Nash, Printers to the state, 1869)
Chapter 3: Sebec River, Sebec Lake and tributaries

for a dam or dams on the river, and probably Davis Brook, in order to drive logs to Sebec Lake. The company could also make river improvements, but could do no blasting at upper and lower Greeley Falls. The legislature amended the charter in 1899 so that excavation and smoothing the upper falls was possible, but not at the lower falls. The charter, as amended in 1901–1902, allowed for dams at Upper and Lower Wilson ponds. In 1907 the legislature amended the charter to increase the tolls on logs, as it had done every other year prior to that, a reflection of use and stream improvements.

On the basis of 1908 Maine Supreme Court documents, some of the Wilson Stream company’s dam building and stream improvements are known. The company hired George Butterfield to rebuild a dam at the mouth of Lower Wilson Pond in 1900. In 1902 the company built a dam at the mouth of Rum Pond. For stream improvements the company did some blasting at Toby Falls, not far upstream from Big Wilson Falls in the Willimantic village. The company also spent $300–$400 blasting at upper Greeley Falls and did some smoothing work at lower Greeley Falls. Whether a dam was ever built at the foot of Upper Wilson Pond is unknown.

The company was probably responsible for the work done at the mouth of the river on Sebec Lake. Logs and booms often clogged Big Wilson Stream between lower Greeley Falls and the Castle, which is just south of Packard landing on the lake’s edge. As a solution a crew dug a channel from Big Wilson Stream into “Glover’s Gut” in order to provide an alternative route for boats, when logs clogged the mouth of the stream.

Logging and driving activity

Lumbermen probably did not cut on Davis Brook until the poplar was mature enough for the excelsior and paper mills. The earliest recorded drive found was in 1896, when a portion of the Howland Pulp and Paper Company drive was on the stream. The drive jammed against Sears Bridge and a crew had to rebuild it. In 1902 G.M. Wise let his drive join another drive on Davis Brook. A year later G.M. and H.F. Wise drove the stream and joined the Spencer drive at Big Wilson Stream. The following year Faunce and Perham (John) drove logs on the stream and apparently joined the drive on Big Wilson Stream. Perham conducted the same drive in 1905. In 1906 Boston Excelsior Company of Milo village had a cut of poplar that it landed on the stream. Smart conducted a similar drive in 1916; the destination of the logs is unknown.

On Little Wilson Stream, Savage drove clapboard cuts beginning in the late 1820s, but he stopped before 1848 and no one returned until 1883 to cut on the stream.

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222 Maine Reports: Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Judicial Court of Maine, December 22, 1908–September 4, 1909, vol. 105, pp. 249–254. In the court documents is the fact that 1638.625 peeled cords of poplar are equivalent to 819,000 board feet of logs.

223 Jerry Packard never heard talk of any old dam sites on the stream and never saw evidence of any.

224 Dorothy Blanchard, Old Sebec Lake (Dover, NH: Arcadia Publications, 1997) Glover’s Gut is presumed to be an index-finger-shaped cove that according to Colby’s 1882 Piscataquis County Maine Atlas paralleled the lower end of Big Wilson Stream; a crew cut the channel from Wilson Stream into the head of that “Gut.”

225 The Piscataquis Observer, April 16 and May 14, 1896

226 The Piscataquis Observer, May 23, 1896

227 The Piscataquis Observer, May 1, 1902

228 The Piscataquis Observer, April 2, 1903

229 The Piscataquis Observer, April 28, 1904
In 1898 Lyman Dudley was the drive boss for the Howland Pulp and Paper Company cut. In the early 1940s lumbering took place between Little Wilson Falls and Savage mill community, but the means by which this cut reached its market is unknown.230

On Big Wilson Stream, the 1868 dam at the outlet of Lower Wilson Pond suggests that loggers began driving from the lake at about that time and perhaps continued to do so on an irregular basis. They also used the water to assist drives landed on the stream. On April 28, 1881 Henderson’s drive on Big Wilson Stream was waiting for higher water.231 A year later on May 25 S. Hodgdon’s drive was hung at Greeley Falls.232 W.H. Welch got his 1883 drive to the William’s mill in Willimantic village where he sawed into the summer.233 In 1887 Goldthwaite, Ellis, and Williams drove the stream and let their logs jam in Elliottsville township for fear of losing them at their Willimantic village mill, William’s mill. Water forced those already in the mill’s boom under it, and they lost the logs when they went over the dam.234 In May 1891 A.G. Crockett had his logs into the millpond at Williams mill, but needed the water to rise in order to drive them into the lake; their destination is unknown.235 At Upper Wilson Pond W.F. Clark logged in 1893, and in 1894 Haynes logged the area from a camp on the pond.236 In 1896 a portion of the 8 million board feet of logs came into Big Wilson Stream on Davis Brook.237

Between 1897 and 1906 Spencer was one of the few loggers driving Big Wilson Stream. In late April 1897 the stream was clear of ice and water was running high, so Spencer wanted to get the logs off Lower Wilson Pond. He broke up the ice by blasting and that sent huge chucks over the dam and damaged the mill at Willimantic village. To prevent jams from forming, he stationed men at Toby Falls, where two fell in, and at Williams Mill where another fell in; all three survived. Men boomed the logs at the mouth of the stream at Sebec Lake, and had to wait for the ice to go out before continuing on to the Howland Pulp and Paper Company. Some unknown person was back driving again in 1899.238 In 1900 a boat and supplies for the Spencer drive passed through Willimantic village from either Monson or Abbot villages and continued on to the landings of his three large cutting operations upstream.239 Spencer was back on the stream driving again in 1901, and by April 18 the water was dropping fast.240 He did manage to get all 7 million board feet of logs into booms at Sebec Lake. Crockett towed the five boom bags with his boats Vivian and Goldenrod, but wind was a factor and held up the towing of the last three bags. Spencer became impatient and contemplated building a more powerful towboat that could pull against any wind. He figured he had another six years of cutting on the stream and the boat would be a worthwhile investment. Spencer was back again in 1902 with 10 million board feet of logs coming down from Elliottsville township; his wangan for the drive included a bateau and a camping outfit.241 The following year Spencer’s drive was 3 million board feet of logs.242 The volume of his drive in 1904, 1905, and 1906 is undiscovered.243

Between 1909 and 1920 a Big Wilson Stream drive occurred nearly every year. The origination of the 1909 drives of George Bessey, a million board feet of logs, and Sawyer’s drive of 3 million are unknown.244 In 1911 Strout of Milo, who cut in an unknown location with 50 horses and probably the usual compliment of men to horses, 3:1, might have driven poplar for Boston Excel-sior mill in Milo village from Davis Brook.245 Another cut was going to the ATCo sawmill in Milo village.

A year later (1912) Strout was once again operating on Big Wilson Stream.246 A portion of his drive included hemlock, from which he stripped the bark that he hauled to Bodfish siding. His drive apparently reached the lake, but low water hung up the drive of George and Seth Bessey on April 25. The 1914 drive of L.C. Moore and Son (Andy), with Mrs. Moore cooking for the men, came from an unknown location on the stream. A year later Will Merrill started up the Hubbard mill in Willimantic.

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230 Guide to the Appalachian Trail in Maine, 1947 Supplement
231 The Piscataquis Observer, April 28, 1881
232 The Piscataquis Observer, May 25, 1882
233 The Piscataquis Observer, May 31, 1883
234 The Piscataquis Observer, May 12, 1887
235 The Piscataquis Observer, May 14, 1891
236 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, May 19, 1894
237 The Piscataquis Observer, April 16, May 14, and May 23, 1896
238 The Piscataquis Observer, April 27, 1899
239 The Piscataquis Observer, April 19 and May 24, 1900
240 The Piscataquis Observer, April 18, May 2, and May 16, 1901
241 The Piscataquis Observer, April 17, May 1, and May 22, 1902
242 The Piscataquis Observer, April 2, 1903
243 The Piscataquis Observer, April 28, 1904, April 13, 1905, and April 26, 1906
244 The Piscataquis Observer, April 15 and April 22, 1909
245 The Piscataquis Observer, April 6 and May 4, 1911
246 The Piscataquis Observer, March 21, April 11, and April 25, 1912
tic village about May 3. Whether teamsters hauled in the logs or a drive crew brought them in on the stream is unknown. The drive in 1917 was for the Sterns Lumber Company that cut in the Wilson ponds area. In 1918 three operations took place: Thede Burgess was drive boss for A.P. Dow’s drive Sterns Lumber Company drove from the Wilson ponds; Bert Knowles crew peeled poplar in Willimantic township, but how the poplar reached its market is unknown.

The driving on Big Wilson Stream subsided markedly between 1920 and 1940. In 1920 the drive was late due to ice in the river. Dow was back again on Wilson Stream and perhaps Davis Brook in 1921 with Christopher H. Preble in charge of the cut. Sometime in the early 1920s Bert Knowles cut below Toby Falls and conducted the last drive of long logs on the stream. The Piscataquis Observer reported in its April 5, 1934 issue that 12 men cutting pulpwood on the South Road in Willimantic township hauled it by truck to Guilford village. The last drive of pulpwood, 350 cords cut by Adin Green, Rex Turner, George Young, and Max Shaw, came down the stream in 1940.

Absent from any documentation about logging on Big Wilson Stream is any mention of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Its tracks reach the north side of Big Wilson Stream near the mouth of Little Wilson Stream and continue parallel to the stream, which it eventually crosses about 2 miles below Lower Wilson Pond. It must have played some role in the logging in this area.

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247 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 29, 1915
248 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 20, 1922. The company’s legal charge was for breach of the Wilson Dam Company charter in 1917 and 1918. The dam held too little water. The court award was in favor of Sterns.
249 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 18 and April 25, 1918
250 *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 20, 1922. The company’s legal charge was for breach of the Wilson Dam Company charter in 1917 and 1918. The dam held too little water. The court award was in favor of Sterns.
251 *The Piscataquis Observer*, May 23, 1918
252 *The Piscataquis Observer*, March 31, 1921
253 Dorothy Blanchard, *Old Sebec Lake* (Dover, NH: Arcadia Publications, 1997)
A log jam at the Salmon Pool in the mouth of Big Wilson Stream at Sebec Lake near Earley’s Landing during the Spencer and Gilbert 1912 spring log drive buries Lower Greeley Falls. (photographer Walter Arnold of Willimantic, courtesy of Mrs. Florence Arnold Southard and The Piscataquis Observer)

The scene above, cleared.
Chapter 3: Sebec River, Sebec Lake and tributaries

Milo village and mills on the Sebec River 1870s. (Dean and Larrabee photographers, courtesy of the Maine Historical Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine, (MHPC.S.11541))

Milo mills on the Sebec River, 1874–1879. (Dean and Larrabee, photographers, courtesy of the Maine Historical Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine, (MHPC.S.10580))

Sebec village dam, 1874–1879. (Dean and Larrabee photographers, courtesy of the Maine Historical Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine, (MHPC.S.15260))