Earlier in this century Alexander Dunnett a successful lawyer of St. Johnsbury had built a large summer home on the southern shore of Ricker's Pond. A contemporary historian wrote at the time "Here he enjoys rest and recreation, and the delights of piscatorial sport. His numerous friends receive a hospitable welcome from the proprietor and his amiable wife." We may give him the honor of being the pioneer of the future colony of summer cottages. However, the house was so large and so beautifully furnished and the style of entertaining so formal it cannot be said to set the pattern of the informal way of life in later cottages. About 1925 Grace Lowe, a young relative of Alexander Dunnett, developed the old Dunnett place at Ricker's Mill into an Inn. She also obtained a motor boat which used to carry passengers across Ricker's Pond to a strip of land between Rickers and Groton Ponds. For many years the building remained unused, filled with its lovely antique furniture until it was demolished about 1940.

From 1960 the State Parks and Forestry Department have used "Lake Groton" in publicity material and signs. To many tourists the word pond brings to mind a small pool in a cow pasture or a lily pond. This more glamorous and appropriate to its size name is not official but in common usage now. Long-time campers still speak of it simply as "The Pond."

IV

The Montpelier and Wells River Railroad

New modes of transportation have, as everywhere else, brought about changes in camping at the Pond and its area. It is difficult nowadays to picture the world of Groton and its lakes without the internal combustion engine. Access to the Pond was really limited to the railroad as there were no roads to it. The advent of the Montpelier and Wells River Railroad occurred on that great day, November 14, 1873, when the first through train was greeted with enthusiasm by all the towns along its route. The new railroad promised expansion and development of industry, especially in the manufacture of lumber and in the granite business because it would be so much easier and quicker to reach markets. From Marshfield on, the rails had been built through a tract of

unbroken wilderness for nine miles skirting the shores of the ponds of Groton. In 1877 General A. Harliegh Hall reported, "The shrill whistle of the 'iron horse' and the busy hum of machinery are heard." This railroad connected the Central Vermont with the Boston and Maine system.

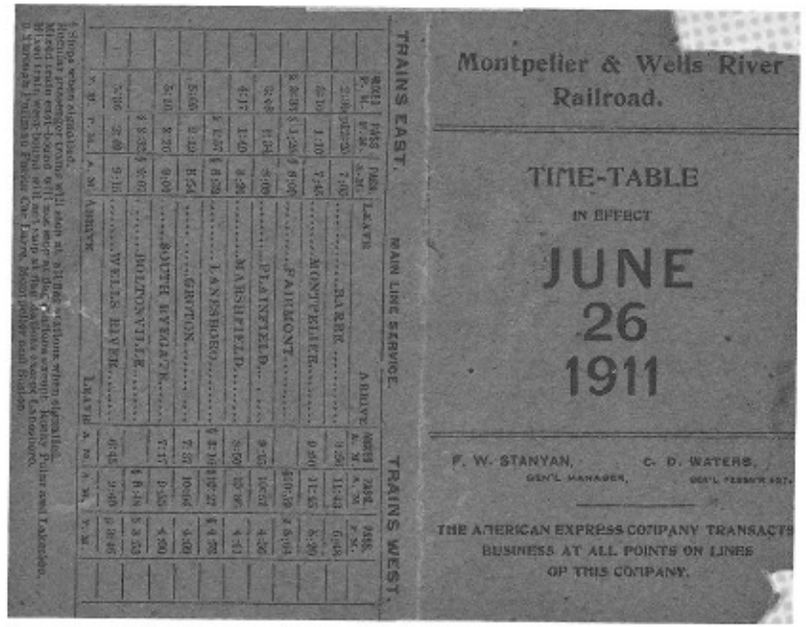
The writer's first memory of the Montpelier and Wells River Railroad is of trips down to watch the big sleeper Pullman cars coupled to the 10 p.m. train at the Montpelier Station. Then Boston seemed to us as far as California does now. And the two long-two short toots of the engine at every crossing as it roared into the night wakened many a camper at the Pond. Before radio, it was our only timepiece when we forgot to wind Big Ben.

The regular stations related to the ponds were at Lakeside (which included a side track) and at Rocky Point. Lakeside Station was a double house, one section of which was always occupied by the owner of the large lumber mill at the south end of Groton Pond. Any children who lived in the mill area commuted to Groton for school by way of the morning and afternoon trains. The Rocky Point Station midway on the western side of Groton Pond was an old wooden railway coach with one side removed but the seats on the ends and other side retained. This managed to survive to the end of the rail service in spite of the hundreds of initials carved on it.

Established on July 31, 1903 this was a flag station. One person in a group was appointed to raise and drop the signal—a white wooden board on top of a pole and moved by a wire attached to it as the train left, although the trainmen always checked. Huge boulders piled precariously high on each other in the glacier age were located at the back and side of the station. While waiting for the train, young folks and children used to consider it great sport to crawl in and out of the openings in this strange formation climbing to the top of the highest rock at the back, then squeezing themselves through the large crevices to the bottom, appearing suddenly at the front. None of these enormous stones was ever shaken down by the movement of the train or persons and they still remain at the site, now a parking lot. On Labor Day crowds of 45 to 60 persons would wait here for the afternoon train to Montpelier and points in between. Those living in Barre had an extra six miles to travel by trolley car, and no one who ever used this station can forget the long steep path down to the water's edge below.

Sometimes the train would stop at the "Tin Pan Station" where a foot path led to the mouth of Stillwater Brook. Just west of this flag station Peabody's Mill had once stood.

In that gracious Edwardian Age before the First World War, eight regular trains a day plus extra freights tooted their way along this route. If the railroad never did fulfill the cosmopolitan future predicted for Groton, it did mean for its generation "the way to get to camp."



Montpelier & Wells River Railroad.

TIME-TABLE

IN EFFECT

JUNE 26 1911

F. W. STANYAN, GEN'L MANAGER. C. D. WATERS, GEN'L PASSR AGT.

THE AMERICAN EXPRESS COMPANY TRANSACTS BUSINESS AT ALL POINTS ON LINES OF THIS COMPANY.

TRAINS EAST. MAIN LINE SERVICE. TRAINS WEST.

TRAIN SCHEDULE 1911

Long afterwards Franklin Clark wrote in his camp log, "when I was a child and summertime came around, we used to make big plans in Groton Village for coming to camp. Supplies to last for at least two weeks were prepared. They filled a large clothes basket, two hand baskets, one or two hand bags, a suitcase for each person—and there was added a five gallon can of kerosene and later gasoline for the motor. It always seemed there was the same amount to take home! Once when we arrived in Groton on the afternoon train after a stay at camp, a villager asked the conductor, Mr. Stebbins, whether his train was crowded. He replied, 'Naw, naw—just a couple of old women and a boy with half a car of baggage.' "

Another conductor who had to cope with the baggage of his passengers was Mr. Eugene Rand. Everyone who rode the train in his time remembers that his pet aversion was stopping the train at Rocky Point —in fact his public relations with all passengers who were campers were not cordial. However, off the train he was a different person, friendly and helpful. One might think it ought to have been the engineer who could have objected to the stop because it was the high point of the pull on the track. When passenger service had dwindled

to two cars and later one multi-purpose car, Mr. Rand banished all persons carrying fish poles to the baggage section. Once Mrs. Minnie Clark said to him, "Now smile, Mr. Rand, we're going to get off at Rocky Point"—and he did! When the hunters used the train, Mr. Rand shouted as a parting comment, "All out—Rocky Point—and don't forget your liquor."

The difficult problem concerning baggage presented itself when the campers arrived at the Pond stations. This was the struggle down the steep path from Rocky Point Station to the shore, still used by campers living in the cottages directly beneath. Its every turn and stone now seem the same as when it was first made. At the shore came the unchaining and launching of the boats and rowing them to the camp. Not only supplies of food and clothing were carried down the path and loaded in the boats but often furniture, lumber, mattresses and even cast iron kitchen stoves. Dishes were sometimes packed in barrels with cork then used by merchants to put around grapes in transit from Spain. Even the roll down the rocky path caused no breakage. Later the cork was used to fill canoe cushions which were an adequate life saving devise.

At Lakeside the road was smooth and level but long. Sometimes a horse and drag from the mill could be hired to carry the load to the water's edge. But many times it was all carried by hand or by wheelbarrow. Then the boat, also loaded with at least four people in addition to all this paraphernalia, had to be rowed up the lake—often against the wind. But once at their destination, to the rowers the camping experience seemed worth all this effort.

Even in winter the train sometimes was stopped at Rocky Point for parties of young folks on their way to skating on the frozen surface of the Pond. New Year's Day was a favorite date for this sport. From Groton they could take the 4 p.m. train, get off at Lakeside, snowshoe to a camp, have supper and return in time to catch the 11 p.m. train back home. Parents and friends had come on an earlier morning train to prepare the supper for the hungry crowd.

There must have been countless adventures experienced by the train crews. Once when a freight train enroute to Montpelier was delayed at Lakeside waiting for the Morse code signal from East Montpelier where a passenger train coming from the opposite direction was due, the engineer of the freight train suddenly decided to get through first. The inevitable collision happened near Tin Pan Station. No serious

damage resulted but people rushed to rescue the freight engineer, the only one missing at the moment. Steam was pouring in great clouds from the engine. The trainmen knew that steam once it has reached outside air is not hot so they reached into the cab but no person was there. He had taken to the woods or "joined the birds" as the saying goes, only postponing admission of his guilt and poor judgment.

The diary of one of the last engineers on the Montpelier and Wells River Railroad, Elton Warren, shows that the last run of a train on this line was November 15, 1956. The right of way was purchased in the spring of 1957 by the State of Vermont and is now used as a secondary road for short distances as the bridges are missing. Driving this road not far from Lanesboro, one comes upon a spectacular view—the black, sheer rockside of the mountain on the east side of Nigger Head Pond. How it must have surprised the passengers looking out the windows of the coaches of the old train as it rounded this curve. There were many such breath-takers.

V

A Forest Fire

On May 13, 1883 a fire spread out of control at Lanesboro. Some say it was started by a spark from the railroad engine, others that the beginning was a brush fire. It quickly developed into a raging inferno which burned several buildings in the village and extended to the Owl's Head area and along the eastern shore to the south end of Groton Pond. At this time the Mill Company here had built many homes for its workers. Word reached Groton the next morning that these people were trapped by the flames. A large rescue party was organized. By the time the men reached the community the homes and mill had been destroyed but the families had been trying to save themselves all day and night by going out on the water in boats. The Dennis family was found near the shore splashing themselves with water to help them endure the heat. The mother was standing in the water holding the baby in her arms. When leaving her home she had had the men carry out to the boat what she considered her most valuable possession—a Singer sewing machine. When the fire seemed more threatening she had the machine dropped into the water. Later she returned to

this spot and had it pulled out. At the time of her death it was found in good condition among her effects.

The rescue party had asked that a special train be made up to take the victims into the hospital in Montpelier. A young engineer, James Boutwell, was at the throttle. He drove the train through the smoke and nearby flames to its first possible stop, East Montpelier, where it had to take on water. None too soon it reached its destination safely as the exteriors of the engine and cars had become overheated. Later the rails were found twisted in all directions. These were the days of the big stacked, wood burning, brass-polished engines and this one was called the Plainfield. At the age of eighteen James Boutwell was running his own engine. At twenty he had made the run from Wells River on schedule for the first time in the history of the road.

A side note of interest in these annals of Groton is that later the brave and efficient engineer, James Boutwell used the same quality courage displayed during his service for the railroads to develop the profitable internationally known granite quarry business "Rock of Ages" in Barre. He was elected mayor of Montpelier four times before his death in 1929.

VI
The Mill

There were several old saw mills situated near the pond; one was at Peabody's Station and another up Coldwater Brook. But from the time of the Groton Steam Mill Company (1879) a larger mill was always located at the southend. After the disastrous forest fire Baldwin and Hazen bought the mill in 1886 operating it for many years.

About 1900 this mill had burned, but the barn, blacksmith shop, boarding house, plus two houses and a school house were saved. Then about 1905 the mill as many now remember it was built by Miller-Ayers Lumber Company to replace the earlier mill. Robert (Rob) Miller was the active manager and lived in the station house. By 1916 lumbering operations at Groton Pond were at their zenith and virgin timber was abundant.

It was a question in the minds of the boys at that time whether it was more fascinating to watch the manoeuvers at the Log Pile at the

north end or the exciting operations at this mill. It was a two story building. Logs were pulled up a sloping structure to the upper level where the sawing machinery was located. The boilers, engines, pulleys, shafting and belting were on the ground level. Three steam engines of 125 h.p., 35 h.p. and 25 h.p. operated the system. Sawdust and some slabs were burned as fuel for boilers. The sawdust pile at the mill at one time burst into flames and this fire lasted in a smoldering sort of way over a period of twelve years. This burning created caverns in the sawdust pile. One day a man walking over its top plunged through and fell into one of the fire excavated caves. He nearly lost his life before with great effort neighbors managed to dig him out.

The source of the water supply was across the railroad tracks on Depot Brook. A large steam whistle shrieked at 7 a.m. each day calling the men to work at which they toiled until 6 p.m. with one hour out for lunch. Saturday brought an early closing at 5 p.m. and Sunday was a free day. This mill closed down in 1924 because of a timber shortage and in 1935 it burned to the ground.

The small community through which visitors to the lake passed seemed to be dominated not by the mill but by the large red boarding house. This was a two story frame building which accommodated post office, store, dining room and kitchens on the first floor and sleeping quarters for about thirty men upstairs. The writer remembers the place because of the many errands to buy fresh milk and other grocery items

at the store in the 1912 era. Often in the early evenings we would see the mill workers sitting by the upper windows. Many of them strumming guitars and singing to us as we walked up the road. Since the language was Portuguese we never understood the exact words, but we were certain the songs were serenades (folk singers of today take note). We had rowed down in a dory avoiding treacherous rocks and the long sand bar between Rocky Point and French's camp. Six oars pulled by six persons was the custom. Often we sang "Moonlight Bay" or "Row, Row, Row Your Boat", or perhaps "Clementine" during the voyage.

Mr. & Mrs. Charles Lakin of Marshfield ran the logging camp at the head of the Pond and summers she was cook at the Mill Boarding House (and a good one too). Israel Jewett was woods boss in the winter and yard and mill boss in the summer. Some of the men who worked in the mill were Mr. Scruton, steam engineer, his son Walter Scruton, steam foreman, Marvin Boomhower, board sawyer, Chester Boomhower and his brother and a Mr. Jones, band sawyers, and Auriel Legare, blacksmith. This last man could be persuaded in his leisure time to fabricate toys for the children at the mill, especially wagons, sleds, and jumpers. Several of these are still in use by great grandchildren today.

VII

The Steamer

To supply this thriving business at the foot of the lake the men cut trees all winter. The first sounds a camper might hear in the early spring when there was still some snow on the ground were the bells jingling and the teamsters shouting as they guided their horses slowly plodding their way along the Coldwater Brook log road or tow path. The logs were dragged to the Northeast shore and yarded at a place known as "The Log Pile"—a large clearing where the Spencer cottage now stands. Here was a long beach with a shallow sand bottom extending quite a distance out.

A steamer hauled the logs from this location down to the mill twice daily. Aside from the weather this steamer and its reliable itinerary leaving the mill at 7:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. were the subjects most mentioned daily by those vacationing beside the pond. Two steamers served this function until the closing of the mill. The first one had a red gunwale and white hull. It was replaced by a replica except the gunwales were painted bluish gray. It was about 30 feet in length and 8 feet wide having a 2 foot draught with an upright boiler and vertical single one stack cylinder engine of about 6 or 7 horsepower. Slab wood from the mill was the fuel. It usually took 75 minutes to come up the lake. This boat was a great convenience to the campers at the north end as it often brought orders of milk, groceries and an occasional passenger to the log pile for the various campers in their row boats waiting its arrival there. George Taplin ran the steamer from 1910 except in the summer when Ralph Lord was the operator.

On the way back a "boom log" usually spruce and about 30 feet long was pulled behind the steamer. A series of short chains ending with hooks were attached to each side of the "boom." The free ends of these toggle chains were then pounded into the logs to be towed. The majority of men who did the assembling were Portugese and had to work standing in the water all day long. Except in mid summer this could not have been too pleasant. Once the logs were ready the much slower return trip was begun. If a south wind was blowing up white caps this operation was difficult. To mark a safe channel logs were sticking upright but at a slight angle out of the water on the eastern part of the pond. Iron rings had been driven into these logs in

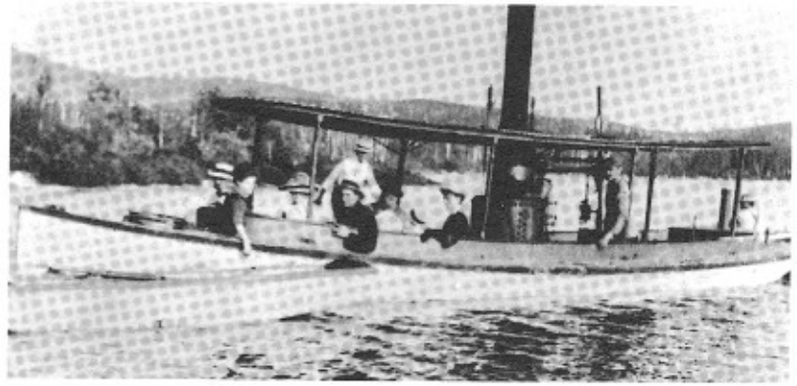
case the steamer with its awkward load of logs should become unmanageable and need mooring en route. There were similar rings in the boulders on shore to serve as good anchors.

In the fall the steamer would go around the shore line and pick up all stray logs. Yet years afterwards swimmers would often bump into sunken logs. It was sometimes used to deliver lumber and slab wood to the various camps. This encouraged the building of new cottages.

The steamer also could be hired to carry groups on a trip around the lake or to a camp. There were two longitudinal seats in front with room for ten people although often many more were aboard. Young folks were always thrilled with a chance to ride the steamer, see her manoeuvered at the log pile and depart with a raft of logs. The fare was 25 cents. It is now realized that Groton Pond had one of the few steamers used in the lumber industry. In Vermont such an investment was reserved for much larger bodies of water.

After the lumber company ceased its operations the steamer was pulled onto the hill near the mill. There is still a mystery as to who bought the boat but it was known to have been towed to Burlington. It was taken over the dryland between the two ponds along a path beside the brook to be floated across Ricker's Pond and to the road and thence by truck to Lake Champlain.

This road to the foot of the lakes had been built in 1931 by the Town of Groton. In earlier years it had been a log road. Shortly afterwards the campers joined to continue this road up the hill at right angles with another abrupt turn north at the top until it ended near



The passengers: William Carbee, J. Henry Goodwin, (Ralph Pillsbury, Richard Pillsbury, 2 children), Ella Pillsbury, Robert Miller (owner of mill and boat), Bert Webber, Blanche White, Lilla Carbee.

Gale's Boat House. Those campers who were unable to do the physical work contributed to the funds for this project. More campers were traveling in the new autos so roads were now a necessity. The construction being undertaken before the time of road building machinery all the work was done by manual labor. The larger rocks could not be removed and for some time it was indeed "a rocky road." In 1939 these two roads were taken over by the State to connect with one that had been built up through Marshfield with the help of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

During the first decade of the twentieth century a boat appeared in competition with the steamer for carrying passengers. It was named the "Bowser" and was owned by Fred Welch. It was a black motor boat about twenty feet long and powered by a six horsepower engine. Another motor boat was the "Beluga" built by the Ball boys from Barre. It was powered by a Pontiac auto engine converted for marine use. Its speed was 20 to 25 miles per hour and it could carry passengers. Pliny Gale constructed a similar boat for passenger service as many persons were driving to the foot of the lake—this to become the second transportation tie to the outside world. Pliny had a flag at the boathouse which was raised when someone wanted a taxi boat. These business ventures received a set back during the 1930 depression years and they were never resumed due to the increased use of outboard motors by individual campers. Pliny's boathouse, however, continued to be a launching place for boats and storage for motors.

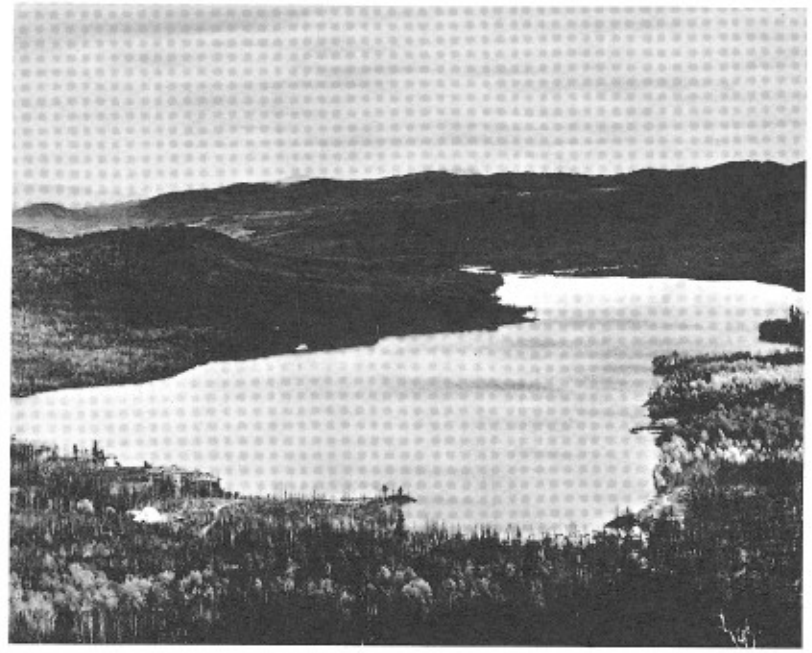
VIII

Early Camping

No doubt the first camping trips were organized at the beginning of the century. In a picture of the Pond taken from Big Deer about 1906 the first camps to be built are seen clearly. The areas around many had few trees as they had been log pile locations earlier. At the north end as far back as the present Beach Road one can see a Stable and Boarding House for loggers on Osmore Brook. The Clark Camp with a porch on the front and side is visible. Then to the east on the small bluff stand two camps looking like two story boat houses belonging to Dr. F. N. Eastman and Sewell Carpenter. Two camps stand under trees near Stillwater Brook, probably the owners were Charles Lord and Dr. Henry Tillotson. On the eastern shore are the Plainfield Camp with the porch on the side instead of the front as now and French's Camp opposite Rocky Point. Not seen were the Colton and Averill properties at Rocky Point Landing. It is noticeable that the west side is thickly wooded with large trees at this time but the east side is covered with a new growth of small trees. The mill and the homes at the south end appear in the distance.

The Lumber Companies owned a great deal of land around the Pond but some individuals had bought considerable shore property. Frank Dawley of Montpelier was a most enthusiastic camper and held title to land on both sides about half way up. As his granddaughter remarked, "He was all wrapped up in the place." At the north end J. R. Hooper of Hardwick was the owner of a great proportion of the land for many years, in fact, Hooper family deeds date back to the time of the Revolution.

Several camps were owned by Fish and Game Associations. The Plainfield Camp is an example. There was a space of time known as "Summer Camp" when the entire group was there but it could be rented at other times to friends at a charge of $7.00 a week. A cook was paid $1.00 a day and his fare per week $.75. Once in 1908 he was presented with a gift of $5.00 for fighting a forest fire three days. Account books showed food prices to be in line with six loaves of bread for $.55. Most of the members lived in Plainfield but there were several from Montpelier and Barre. Names remembered are Bert Shepard, Clinton Cutter, W. G. Nye, Lester Dow, F. A. Dwinell, John



Foss, S. S. Smith, Dean Edson, E. V. Willey. Among the secretary's records is found this resolution concerning the death of a member reflecting the times and their close friendship—"S. S. Smith for many years a loyal and esteemed member—we humbly submit ourselves to the will of Divine Providence—That the impressions and recollections of his life with us will be ever cherished and rehearsed around our campfire."

From 1905 on, many new camps were built on the shores of the Pond. Groups from various towns seemed to build near each other in the same bay. Those from Barre and Plainfield chose the middle east shore. Pliny Gale built a large camp on a point half way up on the west side and above this were several families from Montpelier, the Edsons, Wells, Masons, Shaws, Lindsays, Hewitts and also the Coles from Plainfield. The families from Groton, the Rickers, the Lords, the Eastmans, the Clarks and Whites settled at the north end of the Pond as far as possible it seemed from town. The boat houses belonging to these campers were all at the south end where the boats were safely locked away between trips or during the winter. Pliny Gale had the most space and the best equipped dock. It was used as the most con-

venient launching pad and even storage for many years. The community groups would plan to take their vacations at the same time. These were the days before free Saturdays and "weekends." The long anticipated holiday together was usually arranged during the month of August. If you ask the long time campers about these vacations everyone who enjoyed them says, "Oh, we had such good times fishing and berrying."

One of the reasons for the excellent growth of all kinds of berries was another serious fire in the woodland around the Pond in the year 1908. This is the description of the holocaust copied from the diary of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lord.

Friday, July 10, 1908

"The boys with Alice and I arrived here at 10 a.m. Hot and everything so parched and dry—there having been no rain for three weeks."

Saturday

"Hot and dry. At noon smoke was seen back of the Plainfield camp and in a few hours the whole woods was a mass of flames. All our company here went down to fight the fire. Got back at six o'clock."

Sunday

"Sunday, the fire burned very fiercely all day. Mr. Miller and all the mill crew came up to look after the log pile. It was the hottest day I ever knew up here. The Ball Cottage burned with all in it except the launch which was taken out into the pond."

July 13, 1908 Monday

"We go back today. The fire is not burning so much today but still covers over more space and unless there is rain it will spread all the time. We are in hopes it may rain. Had a fine time only the fire caused lots of anxiety."

October 25, 1908 Sunday

"Wendell and myself came up yesterday. Ralph and Teddy brought us up to Ricker's with a team. We walked up to the Pond and rowed the rest of the way. Put up the boat and Wendell and myself walked back. The forest fire is burning at the foot of the Pond. It is the same fire that was started at the Plainfield camp July 10th and has been burning ever since."

For a long time after the fires, the black trunks of trees stood—a desolate scene until the years toppled them to the ground. One could never dream of the second growth as it covers the hills today. Yet only ten years after the last fire many new families decided this was a good place to build a camp. In the open spaces soon a bountiful crop, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries appeared. The women delighted in filling large pails with these—returning home blackened by the fallen charred trees. Parties of berry pickers used to come up on the train just for the day for this area was known as "Blueberry Country" with the largest berries found on the top of Owl's Head. Wild strawberries grew in their season along the railroad track. These different kinds of small fruit kept an enthusiastic berrier and preserver busy all summer long.

To have been a Groton boy in those years must have been exciting if he was taken to the Pond. Never weary from the strenuous trip to the camp he would no doubt have begun fishing immediately on arrival. The brooks especially Coldwater and Stillwater were favorite fishing spots where the supply of trout was unending. At the mouths of these brooks one could catch bass and pike with worms. Then there were the three mountains, Owl's Head, Little and Big Deer to be climbed. Sometimes the boys caught trout in Osmore Brook on the way before hiking up one of the mountains. There were no trails and the way was very rough. In fact, the only trails were the tow paths cut out by the loggers in the winter. The easier way out from the lake if it was necessary to walk was the tow path halfway down the hill from the railroad track and parallel to it from the north to south end of the