Marblehead Conservancy

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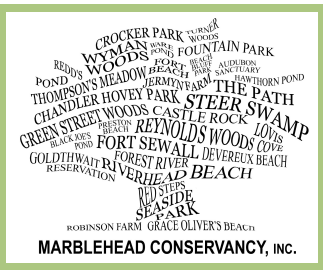
Fall 2023



20 Churchill Road
Marblehead, MA 01945
877-332-3276
www.marbleheadconservancy.org

Good Year for Replanting

Only a year ago, our area was plagued with drought. Fortunately, Marblehead's connection to the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority helped to minimize the experience of households, not so for the natural open spaces. Ponds lost water, with Hawthorn Pond drying up completely and Joseph Brown's Pond shrinking dramatically in size and depth. Nearly a quarter of new plantings put into the grounds of Marblehead's own conservation areas were lost as efforts to maintain watering of remote locations fell short of volunteer abilities. Not good, but like the weather, the story doesn't end there.

Spring planting this year put another sixty-seven shrubs and fourteen trees into the conservation areas, overcoming losses from last year's drought, later storm damage, and invasive encroachment. The good news is that most are surviving. A few have suffered from wildlife browsing but may yet survive and grow as long as their root systems get established.

As we did last year, we are giving some priority to evergreen trees and shrubs. That will make it easier for those walking the trails of our conservation areas to find them and see how they are doing. Those keeping track will see a difference over a year. An average evergreen tree, for example, will grow six to twelve inches a year.

We cannot know what the weather will be next year at this time, but it is certain that this year has been good for plant growth.

Marblehead Conservancy Mission Statement

To protect, acquire, and enhance Marblehead's natural resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the community and the generations to follow.

Renovations at Ware Pond

An Eagle Scout project completed a boardwalk remediation project earlier this year at the Ware Pond Conservation Area, the second of two such projects over the year just passed, helping to insure the integrity of the 180 ft. walk going forward.

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Ware Pond - from page 1, col. 2

This boardwalk, constructed in 2005, has allowed any and all visitors to pass over a swampy area without getting tangled in vegetation and reach an overlook platform at the pond's edge. Although first constructed with wood soaked in a preservative, its predicted life was about fifteen years.

Ware Pond boardwalk when newly installed in 2005.

Time flies, and by 2020, the boardwalk, as expected, was showing signs of decay. Close inspection revealed that the decay tended to be localized, exposing reasons for the damage and raising ideas for improvement.

A first response dealt with potential safety issues. The walk was briefly closed in 2021 while a small number of treads and supporting beams were replaced. In 2022 an Eagle Scout project tackled the larger job of replacing surface planks and their underlying structure for forty percent of the boardwalk length. This year, a second Scout project dealt with further changes that included protecting beam ends, providing an escape route for surface water - this being the greatest cause for damage.

The two Eagle Scout projects have been invaluable in keeping this boardwalk sound and open. The Ware Pond Conservation Area has the distinction of having all its trails accessible to everyone, including anyone needing assistance. This boardwalk is key to that distinction.

One project remains. The structure at the beginning of the boardwalk has been buried under gravel washed down from a nearby slope. This poses no danger to walkers but needs correction so that further slope erosion doesn't send more gravel onto structural members.

Let's Talk About the Dump

Really. Where would we be without the dump (or transfer station if we are being formal)? We appreciate the trash and recycling pickups that happen every week. But there is always that broken dresser or pile of brush from the big maple branch that came down last winter, things you need to dispose of. Then you really need the many services the dump offers.

There is always so much going on there. Residents and commercial landscapers can bring all their disposables to the site. Separate dumpsters are provided for bagged household waste and recyclables: cardboard, paper, metals, hard plastics, electronics, and even cloth.

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Dump - from page 2, col. 2

Contractors and residents can bring leaves and brush to add to the huge piles of leaves and brush already there.

Your Marblehead Conservancy trail crew has had a long relationship with the dump. When trail crew found some 60 used tires abandoned long ago in a swampy area in Robinson Farm, the dump accepted them. When trail crew needs wood chips to curb erosion on a trail or make a trail less muddy, those wood chips come from the dump.

The Transfer Station also accepts large items like mattresses, desks, metal frames, televisions, and other hard-to-dispose-of items for a disposal fee based on their weight, or at a fixed rate. These items are weighed and dumped into the pit.

The Swap Shed is another important spot at the dump. It is a busy place on Saturday mornings. You can bring your lightly used items there, to be recycled by other Marblehead residents who might find exactly what they have been looking for at no charge! The Swap Shed is open May through October every Saturday, 9-11:30, and November- April on the first Saturday of the month, 9-11:30.

Changes are coming! A new site plan for the Transfer Station was approved on August 8th - a project making changes to the pit and its compactor, the scale house and scale, the Swap Shed, and other items.

Give thanks for our dump and all the people that work there.

Trollies in Marblehead?

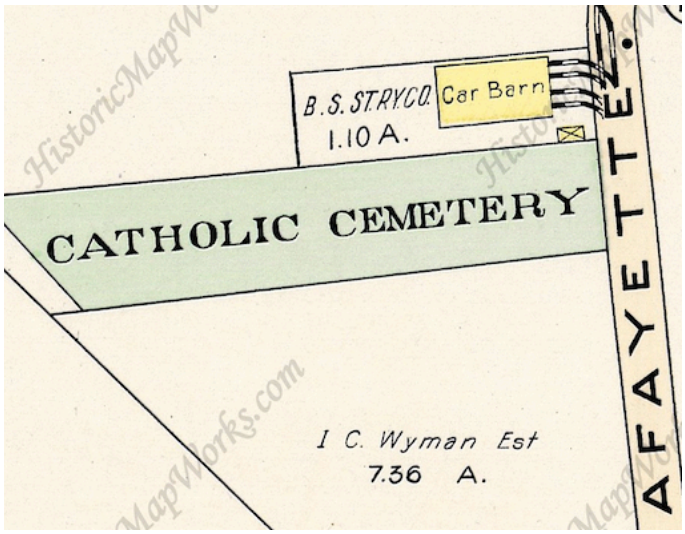

Image from a 1912 map of Marblehead, Section 14, showing the location at that time of the Bay State Street Railway car barn adjacent to the still-existing cemetery on Lafayette Street.

Marblehead did, indeed, once have electric trolley routes, not to be confused with the better known Eastern Railroad lines that once connected Marblehead with Salem and Swampscott.

Trolleys of the Bay State Street Railway Company ran along Pleasant, Lafayette, and Humphrey Streets with a car barn located in an area between a cemetery and an area that is now the Forest River Conservation Area, across Lafayette Street from the Church of St. Andrew.

A Floating Bridge

For a second time since it was built as an Eagle Scout project in 2020, a small bridge in Steer Swamp floated off its foundation due to local flooding. The bridge was

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Dump - from page 2, col. 2

constructed to span a small channel that drained water from a nearby swampy area, a channel that is slowly widening and deepening with heavy rains. Although the bridge looked oversize for its job, the widening of the channel it spanned was a warning of an uncertain future. The rains came and flooded the area.

For repair, the bridge foundation was changed and the bridge anchored back in place. That worked until late July of 2023 when another downpour repeated the flooding and undercut the anchoring. This time, the bridge did not float away, but, as the image shows, one entrance was eroded. The damage has since been repaired and the bridge anchored once again. The channel, however, has doubled in width. can only wonder about more heavy rains ahead.

Functional, but out of place and not anchored.

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Return Service Requested