

Myths, Mysteries & Curiosities

The Wachusett Dam & Reservoir, as happens with all very large or very old projects, has its share of interesting or vague stories. Most, if not all, however are perfectly logical.

Here are discussions of a few of them.

Myth: There Are Bodies under the Dam

There are no bodies under the dam.



Hundreds of workers, performing a variety of dangerous tasks, were employed at the Wachusett Dam.

The dam was constructed at a steady pace, with large rubble stones placed one at a time, by hundreds of men who all went home every night with none missing. Injuries occurred to some men, of course, but when that occurred they were carefully ushered to a safe location and treated.

From films of the Hoover Dam showing wet concrete dropping from great height some get the impression that work would not be stopped to rescue any worker falling into the pour. No record exists of any worker lost there. It's just a rumor.

Myth: There Are Bodies under the Reservoir

There are no bodies under the reservoir.

Two cemeteries were located within the project limits. Careful, sensitive studies and effort were made to ensure beyond doubt that the solution to this matter was undertaken to the satisfaction of all.

Beaman Cemetery, East Main Street, West Boylston

The Beaman Cemetery, located about a mile from the Old Church in West Boylston, was established by prominent early settler and businessman Maj. Ezra Beaman for his family and close associates.

Overlooking his textile mill, it contained but a small number of graves within its surrounding stone wall. All were moved from there to a quiet corner of the Mt. Vernon Cemetery, off Church Street, in West Boylston.

The original site lies under twenty feet of water.



Beaman Cemetery, East Main Street, West Boylston.

Wachusett Dam & Reservoir



About sixty graves were easily identified within its surrounding stone wall.



Each grave was removed. All that remained was the stone wall.



The Beaman Cemetery graves today, together in a quiet section of the Mt. Vernon Cemetery in West Boylston.

St. John's Roman Catholic Cemetery, Clinton, Mass.



Entrance to St. John's Catholic Cemetery.

This large cemetery contained over 3,900 graves and was located very near the modern North Dike. Lengthy negotiations between the Water Board, the Roman Catholic bishop in Springfield and the local cemetery commission resulted in the closely supervised and dignified removal of 3,902 graves to a completely new location several miles away.



St. John's Catholic Cemetery near the North Dike.



As the graves were removed the good quality gravel was taken for use in the North Dike.

At St. John's Cemetery in Clinton the sand and gravel was of such good quality that it was removed across a wide area in that place, to a depth greater than that of any grave there, and used in the construction of the nearby North Dike. Meticulous records of removals were kept by the local cemetery commission.

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The gravel was excavated over an area wider than the cemetery, ensuring that no grave was overlooked.



Reinterment at the new location in Lancaster, Mass., also closely supervised.

Myth: There Are Buildings under the Reservoir

No buildings were left standing under the Reservoir.

To preserve the purity of the water in the new reservoir all organic materials, including wooden buildings, were removed along with trees, sanitary systems and farm soils.

Houses under the dam.



Why should these two houses be standing in the middle of a construction site?

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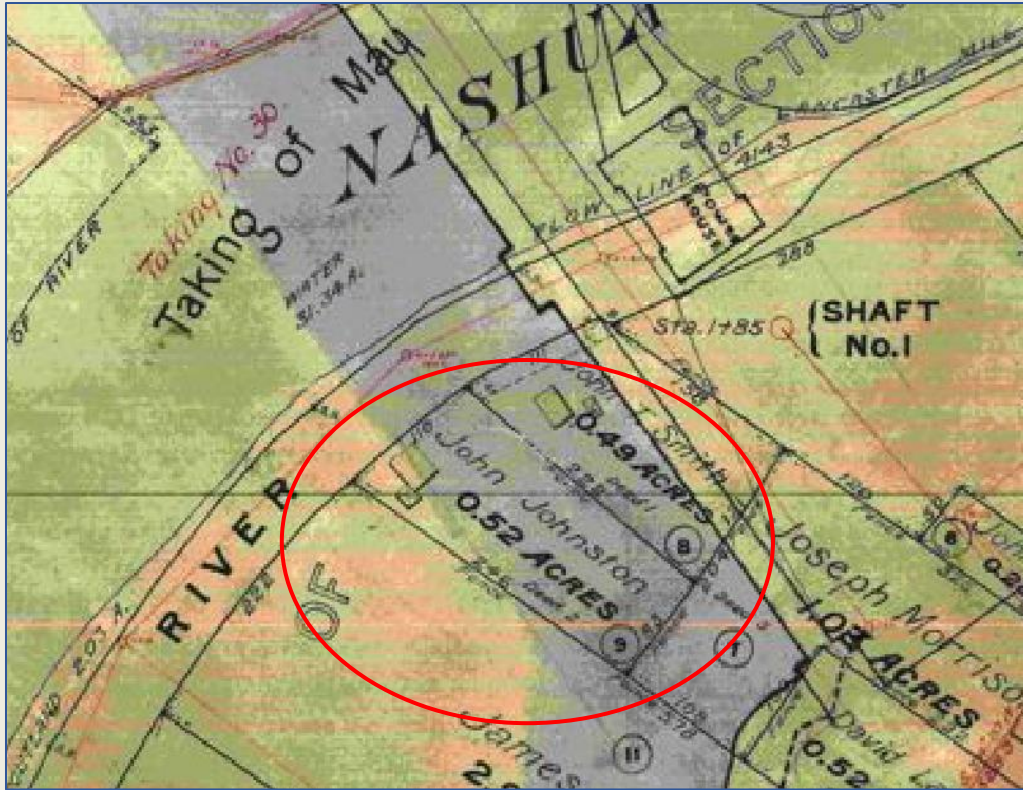


An island of serenity surrounded by dangerous activities.



John T. Smith's 1 ½ story house.

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John T. Smith's and John Johnston's two houses were located practically within the dam layout.



John Johnston's two story house.

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Smith's house was dragged close to Johnston's house and both used as office space during construction.



Ultimately both houses were demolished.

Poultry Farm of Julia D. Pratt, Boylston



Julia D. Pratt's commercial poultry farm.

Julia D. Pratt operated a thriving poultry farm in Boylston with thousands of chickens. Her property was located within the new Reservoir at its very shoreline.



Residence and barn of Julia D. Pratt.

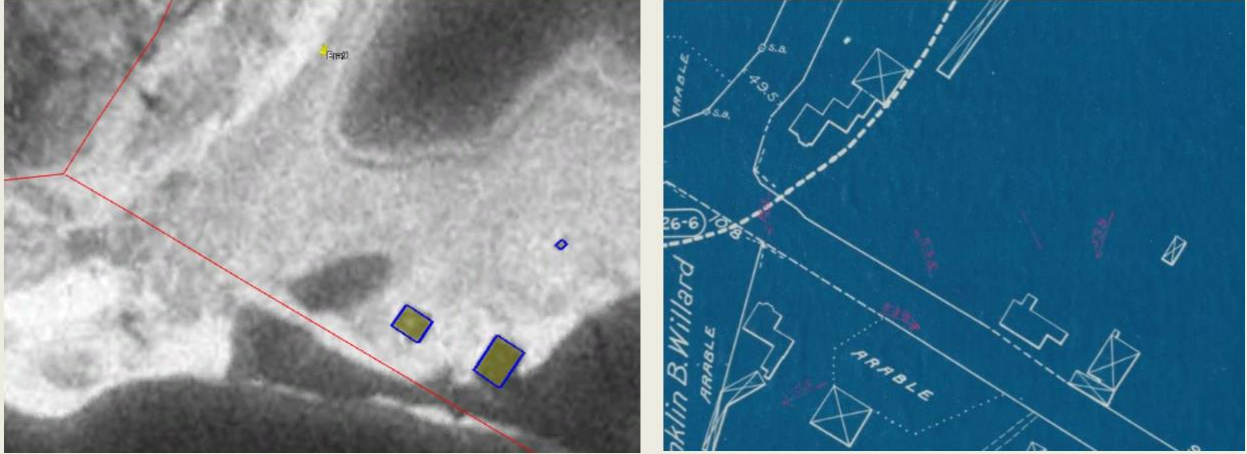


Twelve bay hennery with end feed shed.



Fifteen bay hennery with center feed shed.

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Julia D. Pratt's buildings along the new shoreline.



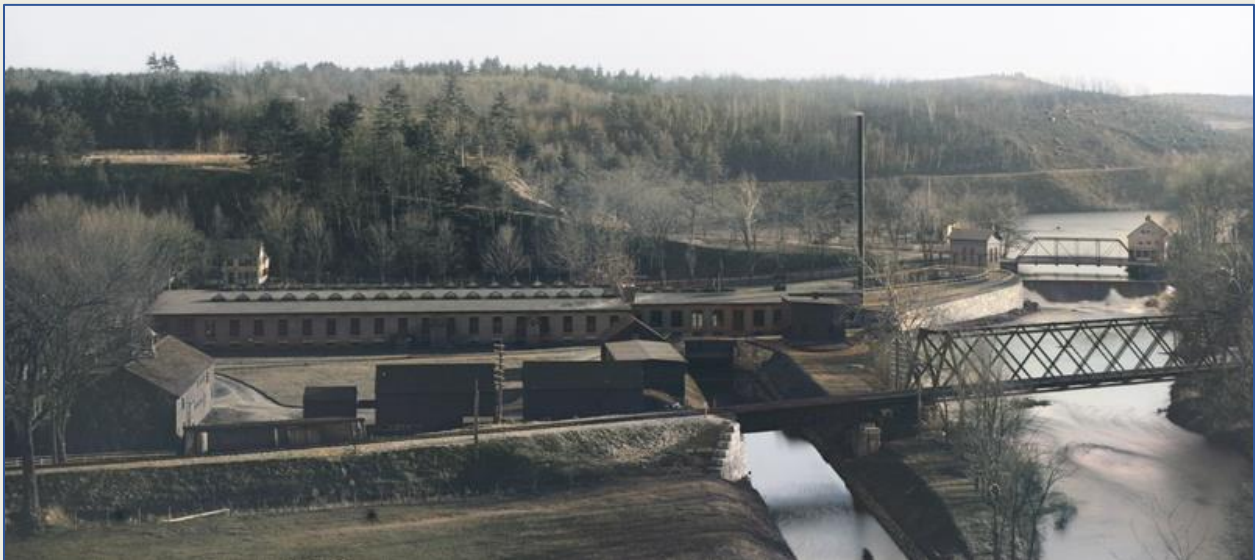
Cellar holes remaining in shallow water.

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Root cellar foundation hole exposed during low water.

Sawyer's Mills, Boylston



Sawyer's Mills buildings, bridges and nearby residences.

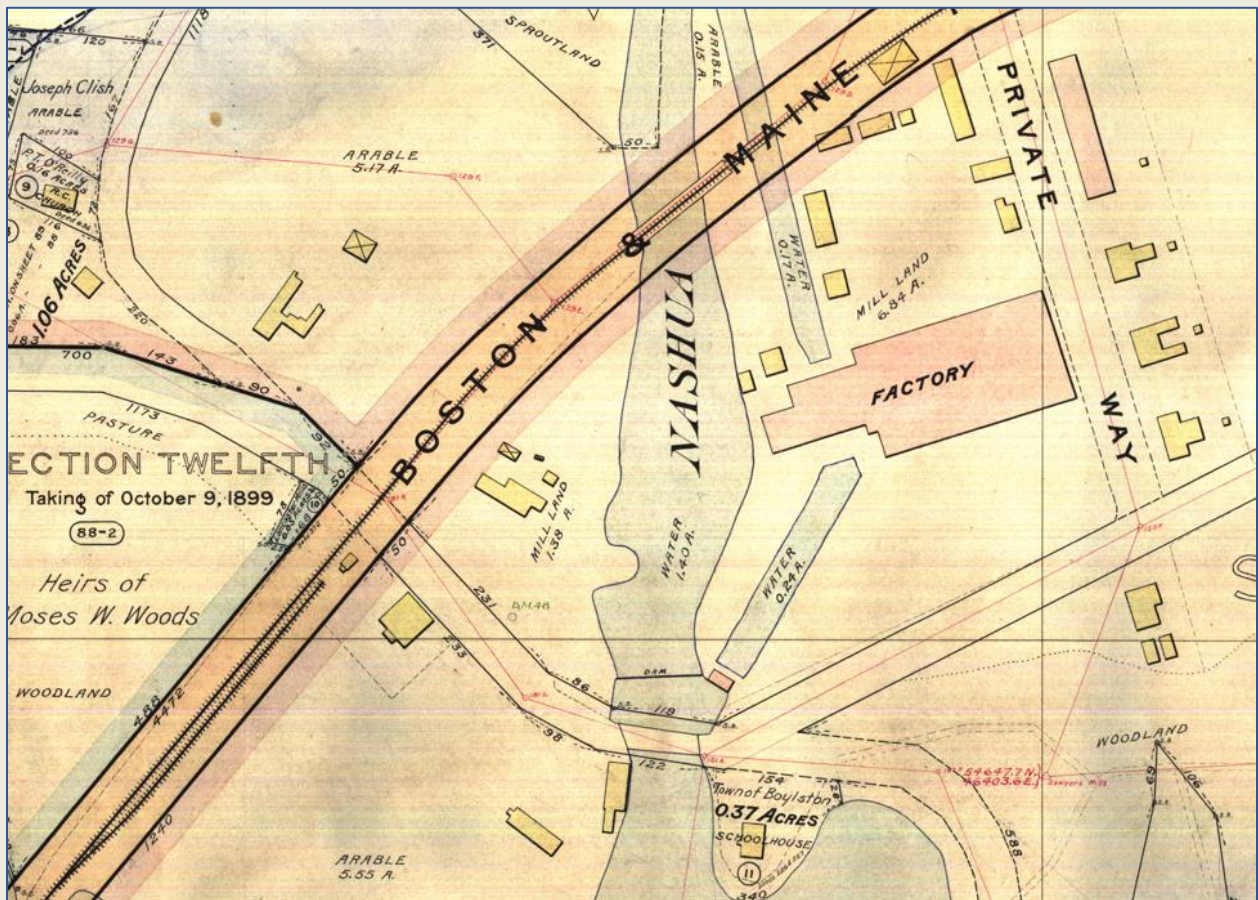
There exist, in the archives, images depicting a number of partially submerged wooden mill buildings. Rumors abound of wooden building submerged, and left to rot, beneath the waters of the Reservoir.

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Rising waters appear to submerge wooden buildings. June 22, 1903.

Photos like this led to the myth of buildings under the waters.



Sawyer's Mills & Boylston Station.

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Mill housing, bridges and local residences. June 22, 1903



Foremen's housing on the mill property.

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General Manager's house (left) and foremen's housing (right).

In the event, a period of unusually heavy rains added to the waters accumulating behind the new dam faster than could be dissipated.

The following two photos, taken a year later on March 11, 1904, prove that all of the buildings had been removed.



The village carriage bridge spanning the Nashua River.

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Sawyer's Mills and Boylston Station.

The mill property and the village devoid of any buildings at all. All railroad property, bridges, rails and poles, have also been removed.

Clarendon Mills, West Boylston



Clarendon Mills on a quiet morning.

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Clarendon Mills was the second largest mill in the valley, employing around 200 workers.



Clarendon Mills under demolition. April 8, 1902

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The race is on to complete the demolition and remove the debris. April 22, 1904



Too late! The rising waters have reached the remains of the Clarendon Mills. May 31, 1904



So it remains today, with the top of the brick wall barely twenty feet below the surface.

Bridges to Nowhere

At times the builders had to weigh the cost of demolition and disposal against simple abandonment. Items made from materials that were stable and would not rot or decompose were left in place.

For instance, of the two churches in West Boylston the wooden Roman Catholic Church was demolished while the Baptist Church, constructed of stone, was left standing.

Wrought iron was stable and resistant to rust so certain bridge structures were left in place, where they remain underwater to this day.

The Central Massachusetts Railroad Bridges

The length of the railroad between West Berlin and Oakdale would be taken with all of its equipment removed. Its earthen embankment, however, was surrendered to the various contractors for their use in stripping the organic soils from the floor of the basin.

These two bridges, with their rails converted to narrow gauge, would remain as long as possible to facilitate this work, even as the new causeway rose higher and higher around one of them, partially burying it.

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Twin railroad bridges near the causeway (Sterling Street) in West Boylston.



The new causeway (Sterling Street) would intersect one of the bridges.

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The railroad bridge and the completed causeway stone arch bridge.



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Bridge covered. Note the horse drawn street trolley on the left.



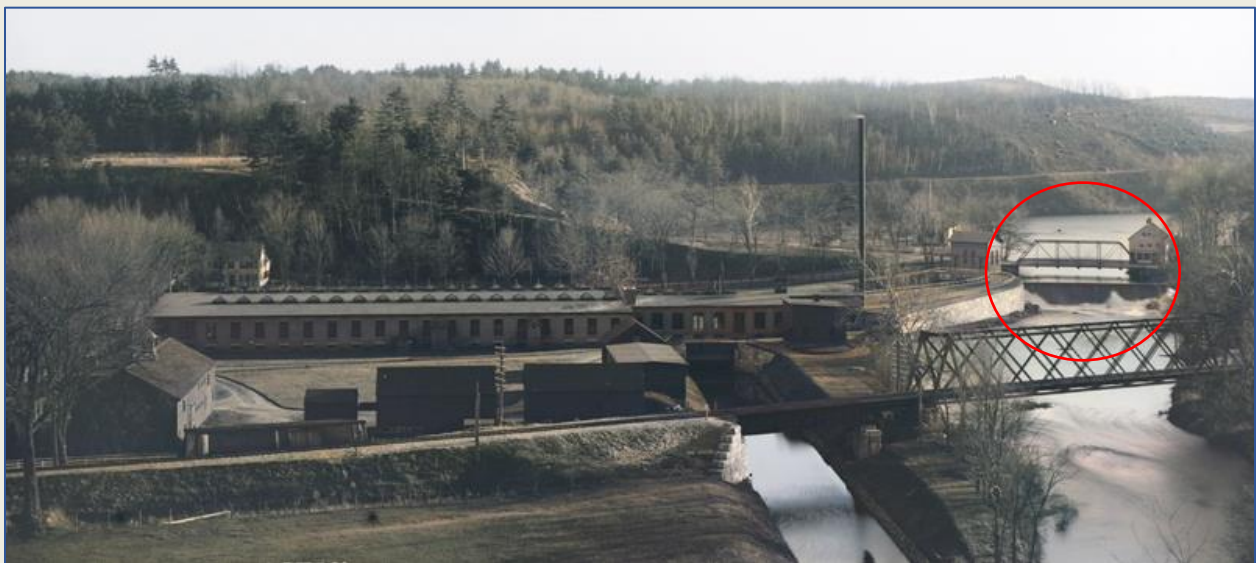
Gone...but not forgotten!

Carriage Bridge at Sawyer's Mills

A little mill town was located near Sawyer's Mills in Boylston. It had grown along with and had acquired a schoolhouse, post office, general store, church and even a railroad station. A carriage bridge carried traffic across the river and millpond and connected mill and its village to the surrounding towns.



The carriage bridge at Sawyer's Mills. Post office beyond.

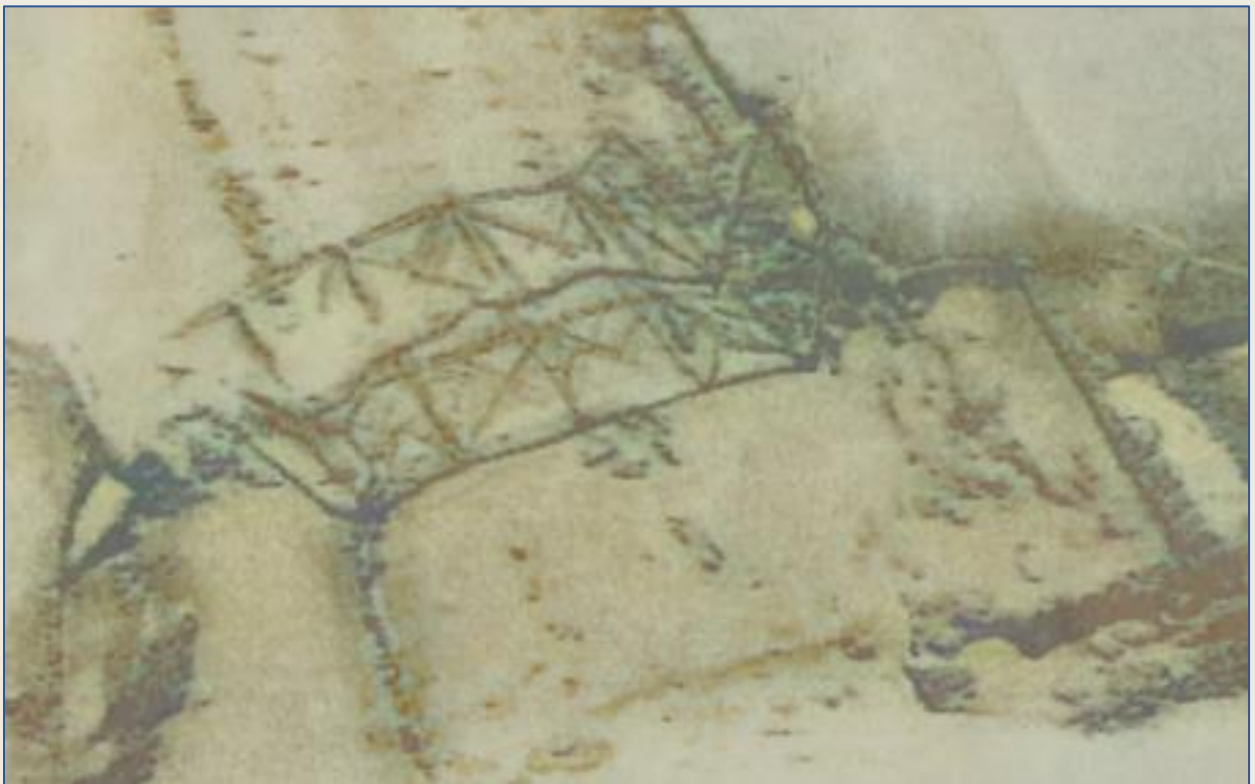


Sawyer's Mills, millpond, railroad and the carriage bridge.

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Houses and buildings removed, the carriage bridge was left standing in place.



Modern sonar image of the carriage bridge, now standing in eighty feet of water.

Scar Bridge

Scar Hill Road, once connecting Boylston and West Boylston, had upon it a carriage bridge spanning the Nashua River. It lies today about 400 feet offshore in eighty feet of water



Scar Bridge near Albertson's sawmill and topsoil dumping platform.



Scar Bridge and drained millpond. Beyond soil removal tracks lead off to the North Dike.

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Scar Bridge spanning the Nashua River near the drained millpond.



Scar Bridge.

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Scar Bridge. Modern sonar image.

Sunken Ponds

Several existing natural ponds were submerged beneath the rising waters of the reservoir.



Down 29 feet! Aerial photo (c.1930) of the reservoir during low water.

Carville's Ice Pond



Clarence Carville's ice pond on Old Boylston Road.



Ice Pond, Old Boylston Road and construction railroad.

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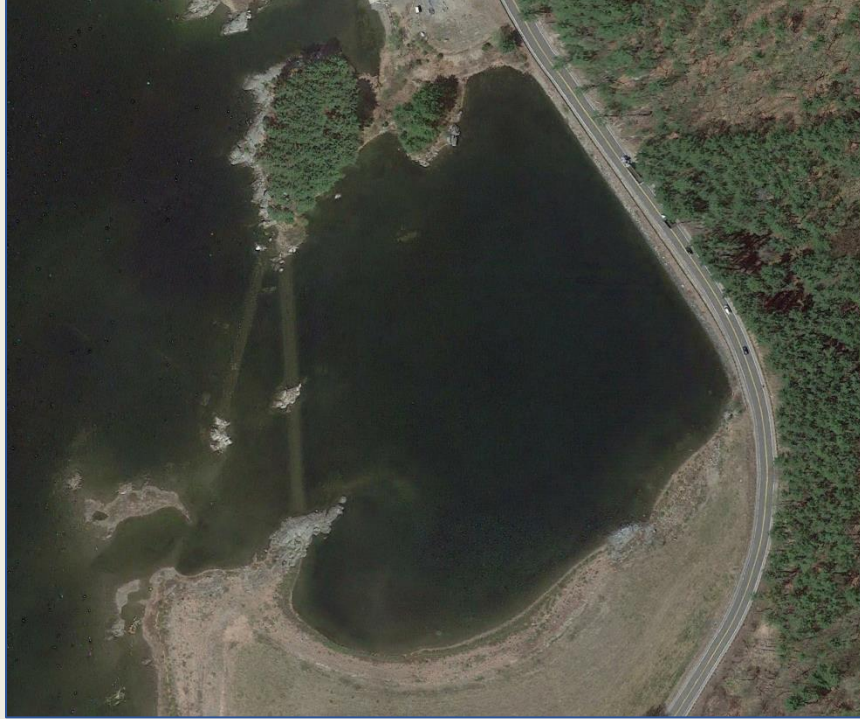


Ice house on Old Boylston Road.



Carvilles harvesting ice in January 1897.

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Two mysterious structures can be seen in shallow water...



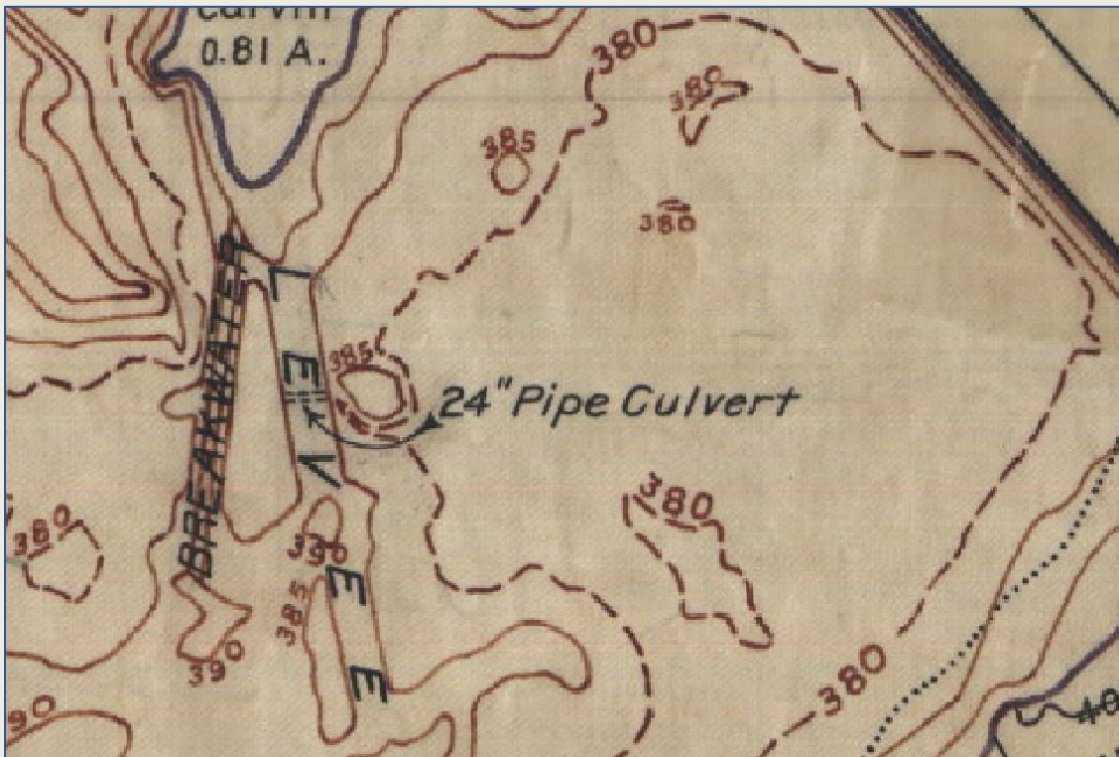
...but they do not align with any roads.

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Not a road??

Courtesy B. LaRoche, DCR



A little research reveals a Levee with protective Breakwater added later.

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the rubble stone for the Wachusett Dam was quarried, and was hauled to the dike on cars and placed with derricks.

The same contractor also constructed a breakwater across the outlet of the basin, formerly the Carvill ice pond, to protect a levee which was built by day labor.

Work under this contract was begun on April 29 and finished on September 30, the maximum force being 32 men, for the week ending July 8. Under this contract there were placed 11,991 cubic

Annual Report of the Chief Engineer for the Year 1905

Sandy Pond, Clinton



Sandy Pond, looking west from South Main Street.



Sandy Pond, looking west from North Dike.

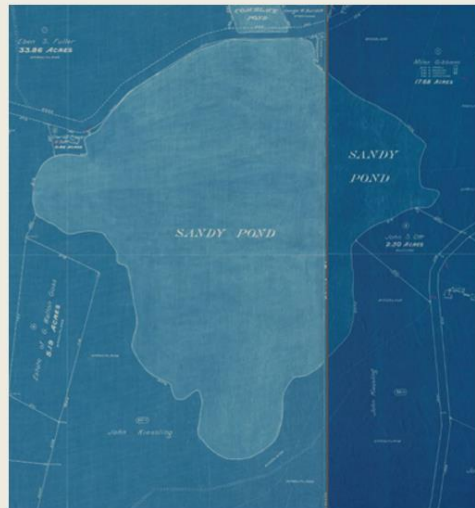
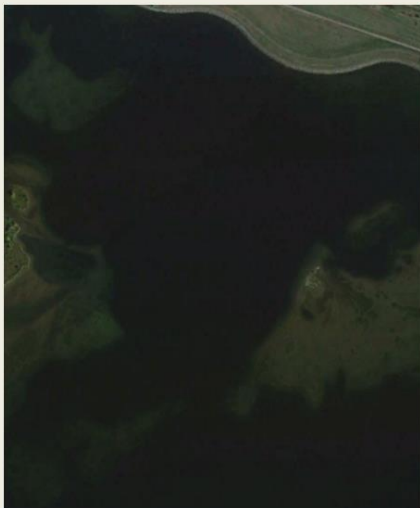
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A dark outline in the water offshore at the North Dike and Cemetery Island

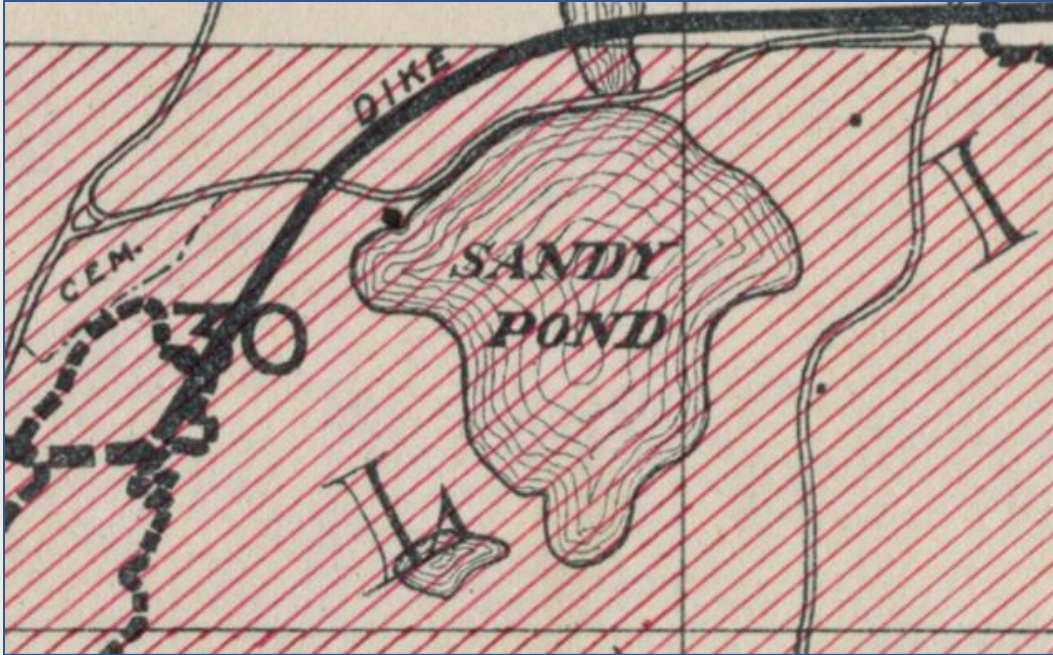
This natural pond was formed when the receding glacier left behind a huge block of ice. Upon its melting a depression, referred to as a kettle hole, was formed. This depression filled with water and became a pond covering nearly fifty acres a hundred feet at its deepest point.



Dark shape offshore at North Dike & Cemetery Island



Aerial photo compared to survey sheets.



Sandy Pond

That's all for now

Many more oddities and anomalies exist and will be presented in the future.