



## MAINE WILDERNESS WATERSHED TRUST REACHES 20-YEAR MILESTONE

By Jerry Bley

*January 20, 1989*

*You are invited to attend a meeting to discuss the possibilities of creating an organization to help in protecting and managing the Pierce Pond Country. Hopefully, the outcome of the meeting will be an organization called, "Friends of Pierce Pond."*

*I'm sure you are very aware that the woods and waters which serve as the very foundation of the recreational activity and surroundings you enjoy are being threatened. In fact, the wild lands of Maine have been changing dramatically in the past few years, and the future is uncertain at best. This is the reason why we have made an effort to be prepared to help protect Pierce Pond, and there appear to be avenues available.*

*I'm initiating this endeavor by inviting, or asking, a select core of 15 to 20 Pierce Pond people to attend this very important meeting.*

*The luncheon-meeting will be at Dimillo's Floating Restaurant, Wednesday, February 1<sup>st</sup> at 12:00 noon. Cobb's Camps and Penntech will host the lunch. It will be Jenny's beef stew! (just kidding).*

*Sure hope to see you there.*

*Very truly yours,*

*Gary*

This letter, from Gary Cobb to a small group of Pierce Pond stalwarts is the opening chapter of a remarkable conservation success story that continues today. At the time, the development boom of the late 1980's was in full swing. Long-time timber ownerships in the Maine Woods were being sold off to land speculators and developers and carved up into subdivision lots for second homes – particularly along scenic lakes. In fact, one of the major timber holdings along the east shore of Pierce Pond was scheduled to be put up for sale. Gary's prophetic words, "the future is uncertain at best," became the mantra that led to the formation of the Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust later that year and has guided the organization's conservation initiatives ever since.

In 2009, MWWT celebrates twenty years of land conservation achievements. The Trust's success cannot be gauged by traditional organizational measures such as the size of its annual budget (quite lean), the dimensions of its headquarters (we don't have one), the growth of its membership (we've maintained a small but loyal family of Pierce Pond supporters), or the size of its staff (we utilize three part-time contractors). Browsing through the thick binder that includes the deeds and conservation easements that were acquired through the efforts of MWWT might begin to give you a sense that the Trust has been busy over the past two decades. However, the only way to truly understand and appreciate the value and accomplishments of the Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust is to spend a few days on and around Pierce Pond—view its unspoiled beauty, listen to the sounds and silence of nature, glimpse its wildlife, walk its woods and fish its clear pure waters. The fact that a visit to Pierce Pond today would be indistinguishable to a similar visit in 1989 is the single greatest testament to the Trust's work.

MWWT's organizational mission is clear and concise: "to protect the wild character, natural resources and scenic beauty of the Pierce Pond watershed and preserve traditional public recreational use of the area." Over the past twenty years the group's focus has never strayed or flagged. Below is a brief timeline highlighting the steps that have been taken to ensure that this mission is achieved:

- 1989: Upon learning that the eastern shore of Pierce Pond may soon be sold off, friends of Pierce Pond gather and decide to start a land trust. The Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust is born.
- 1990: Through the efforts of John and Peter Leslie, MWWT receives a donation from T.P. Properties Corp. of a conservation easement on 1700 acres of land along eastern shore of Pierce Pond.
- 1991: T.P. Properties puts the easement lands up for sale. MWWT finds a conservation-minded buyer (Charles & Trudy Valentine) to purchase the property.
- 1994: MWWT prepares application to federal Forest Legacy Program to purchase conservation easements on remaining watershed lands.

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## My thoughts on the Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust, and why it is important to me and my family

The greatest event in the last century to affect the environment of Pierce Pond was the founding of MWWT. One other important event was the founding of a sporting camp on its shore well over a century ago. Very soon, Pierce Pond Camps and Pierce Pond became a special bond. One complements and supplements the other. A sporting camp operation has many reasons to deem it successful, the most important being the water and woods shaping the surrounding environment. The ragged shore and the country around not only add to the enjoyment of a visitor, but in the case of the Pierce Pond environment, it makes a trip memorable. We must preserve this so our children's children shall continue to find excitement in the use of a canoe and fish line.

When my family arrived in 1958, Pierce Pond was close to being a wilderness. The trees were dark and big and thick. Any old "tote" roads were enchanting to follow, but would peter-out in a stand of large trees. When the area was targeted for logging, we knew that roads would replace the "tote" roads, and there was always the threat that development was apt to follow. In 1988, development came within a few good golf swings of the watershed. It was the Patten Corporation, the most infamous land speculator of that era, who carved 2000 acres into 43 building lots. Then, the whole east shore, owned by T.P. Properties (a subsidiary of Penntech), was about to go on the market. Would this be Patten's next target? John and Peter Leslie, as fate would have it, were owners of the company, and best yet, they were both Pierce Ponders. In my estimation, John, the company president, played a big role in protecting Pierce Pond. He was troubled by who might end up with the land, and encouraged the formation of a land trust, so he could place some protective

covenants on the property. He was more than accommodating to sell the land to another Prince of Pierce Pond, the late Charlie Valentine, and his family. Charlie said, "We will take care of the east side so you will be free to take care of the west side."

Camp talk was entirely about protecting the watershed from land developers and speculators. A group gathered in the dining room to discuss the future of Pierce Pond. Everyone in the group agreed that we can no longer take the well-being of the pond for granted. During October, Betty and I, along with Peter Leslie met with David Soule, an attorney from Wiscasset to discuss any legal issues of forming a trust. This was soon followed by the famous Ad Hoc meeting held at DeMillio's Floating Restaurant. Many Pierce Ponders attended as did landowners, representatives from Trust of Public Land, the Maine Appalachian Mountain Club, the Appalachian Trail Conference, and some local people. This was a lively meeting and the momentum soon led to a board of directors and the beginning of the Trust.

The only word that I can think of when describing the MWWT is HUGE. The last 20 years has led to marvelous accomplishments for Pierce Pond. Speaking as a sporting camp operator, and speaking for my family, I cannot start to tell you how much we respect the work of the trust. We appreciate the hard work by individuals, and the generosity of all of you who supported the work with your contributions.

*Gary Cobb*



**Gary Cobb**

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## REFLECTIONS ON PIERCE POND AND MWWT

We asked few long-time friends of Pierce Pond to share their fondest memories of Pierce Pond and their thoughts on the importance of the Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust

### Doug Allen

#### Five generations of fishing Pierce Pond

About 100 years ago my wife's grandfather, George Beardsell, started fishing at Pierce Pond. His 1917 trout is on the wall. Today, the fifth generation comes to Pierce Pond to enjoy our fishing as well as the tranquility and peace it provides.

I first came to Pierce Pond in August, 1947 as a guest of Richard Breed, his wife and daughter to whom I was to be engaged. We paddled across the Kennebec and came by wagon to the dam. Although I had fished in Maine all of my life, this was a test that I as a real fisherman. At lunch one day at the sand beach at Middle Pond, Mrs. Breed commented on how much she liked partridge. The guides (Iral Bean and Bert Morris) left for a moment and returned with two partridges they had found by chance "dead in the woods."

Our family, all dedicated fisher people, return every August as a must trip. There are few places today where such a group can feel at home, at ease as we listen to the wild cries of the loons.



Doug Allen

### Charlie Burnham

#### Founding MWWT Director and past President



Charlie Burnham

Immersed in ongoing MWWT activities, it is enjoyable to stop and take a perspective look back at 20 years of Trust achievements. I well remember the day in late September, 1988 that Gary had a meeting of a small group of us at the Camps. A representative from the Trust for Public Land was encouraging us to organize into a land trust and protect the area, as the threat of development was getting very close headed by the Patten Corp. At the end of the meeting I remember saying to Gary that this would not be easy.

The success of MWWT is mainly due to a strong loyal membership. In the beginning we were warned that raising money would be a problem since none of us owned property in the watershed. This would separate us from successful other land trusts. One of the most satisfying aspects to me is that we proved everybody wrong and there are virtually no development rights left in the watershed. The members of MWWT are a very special group and should be proud of what has been accomplished. This dedicated clan known as Pierce Ponders is in great part the result of wonderful efforts of the Cobb Family and their operation of the Camps for 50 years.

### Alice Rand

#### Former MWWT Director

Fishing at Pierce Pond has become an annual necessity in my life. Although we have enjoyed a variety of fishing elsewhere in such places as Montana, South America and Mexico, nothing holds a candle to catching a wily trout or salmon in Pierce Pond.

Being on the placid waters of the Thoroughfare on a hot sunny day with splashes taunting you on either side of the boat or seeing your 6-year-old grandson in a totally miserable downpour, grin and pull in his first salmon is truly special. Add to those memories the sighting of a beautiful rosy maple moth hanging out on your porch stairs, or seeing a thicket of swallowtail butterflies hovering over a mud puddle at the landing. But it isn't just the peacefulness and beauty of the area, it is the exceptionally warm banter with the staff and guides and the knowledge that the guests are so appreciative of this unusual place. I look upon Pierce Pond and its environs as a refreshment to life, an experience which needs to be preserved for the future, a kind of compass leading us out of the disorder and chaos in the outer world.



Alice Rand

## **Rick Wallace**

### **Founding and current member of MWWT Board of Directors**



Rick Wallace and catch

A place without people is just that – a place. I've had the privilege to visit my share of beautiful, pristine, and remote places all over the world, yet few have captured my heart as has Pierce Pond. It is a place, which I will forever associate with my father, who introduced me to the Pond in the mid-1960s.

Our annual trip there was about more than just fishing – it was an opportunity to talk candidly about our lives and feelings. It was an opportunity to enjoy stories told with authentic Maine humor, and

earnestness by guides like Reggie McCollar, Alfred Marble, and Steve Staples, and to enjoy their splendid fish chowders. It was an opportunity to meet some of the most colorful personalities who ever held a flyrod. It was an opportunity to get to know the Cobb family; their kindness and concern for their guests, and their unwavering commitment to the welfare of Pierce Pond. It was an opportunity to make new friends and acquaintances with the regular guests and staff and enjoy swapping stories around the dining-room table.

Eventually, our trips included

my son, Rick Jr., and the opportunity for three generations to share a special week together in a setting which has changed little since I first set eyes upon it forty-five years ago.

And, in a few years hence, when my grandchildren come to the Pond with me for the first time, and I see the look of wonder and excitement on their faces as a new generation experiences the tradition of Pierce Pond, I will smile, and remember that day, twenty years ago in a Portland restaurant, when, with a hope and a dream, the MWWT was born.

## **Scott Hutchinson**

### **Founding MWWT director and long-time treasurer**

Our world is speckled with beautiful places and the Pierce Pond watershed is certainly one of them. But what makes the area especially beautiful are the people who come to Pierce Pond and the people who run the camps. Without the caring, thoughtful, generous people who participate in the development of MWWT and preservation of the watershed, it would just be another beautiful place in God's world.



Scott Hutchinson

## **Bob Eastman**

### **First MWWT President**

Without a doubt, my most memorable trip to Pierce Pond was one of the last days of fall fishing in the late 1980's. We had been having no luck for our entire stay. On our last afternoon, we ran into Greg at Lindsay Cove and he mentioned that some departing anglers had said that there were fish up in the Basin. My wife, Mary, was not interested in making the trip so I dropped her off at the Camps and headed out to the Basin. Shortly after arriving near the dock, fish were rising like crazy! I grabbed my fly rod and started catching one salmon after another, including two board fish. I kept fishing until I caught a large trout (2.5 lbs.) and then, feeling that I had caught my limit, headed back to the Camps. At the dock, I ran into Dr. Powell and told him of my good luck and he took off like a rocket. He came back after dark and had not seen a rise.

Our fishing trips to Pierce Pond over the years have all been great experiences – fish or no. It is a place of solitude, beauty and just plain back-woodsiness. In all our trips to other locations, nothing compares with Pierce Pond in our view.

## **John Leslie**

### **Played key role in protecting east shore of Pierce Pond**

My involvement with Pierce Pond began almost by accident when my company, Penntech Papers Inc. got involved with the paper mill in Madison in 1975. Former Governor Ken Curtis was back in legal practice at the time and was our attorney. I was talking to him about where good fishing was in Maine and he thought Pierce Pond was as good as any. So we went up for the first time and the fishing was great. I have been back every year since.

After many early morning discussions at the Pond with Gary, I decided to place a conservation easement on the whole east shore to prevent large scale development. It was easy enough to draw an easement but we couldn't find anyone to accept it as required under Maine law. The large conservation groups active in Maine at the time were only interested in protecting the ocean front. So, people got together to create MWWT in 1989 and the easement was donated to the trust in 1990. In 1991, we decided to sell off the remaining assets of the company including the Pierce Pond lands. When the land was put up for sale, a number of Pierce Ponders became very concerned about who would buy it. Ultimately, the land was sold to Charlie Valentine who was just the right person at just the right time. Problem solved.

In my view, the greatest accomplishment of the Watershed Trust was its spearheading the protection of the S.D. Warren lands along the western shore of Pierce Pond. It was a remarkable achievement and all involved have earned the undying thanks of all those who love Pierce Pond and those who are still to come.

## **Charlie Abbe**

### **Founding MWWT director and camp owner on Abbe Island**

I was 11 years old in 1939 – my first trip to Pierce Pond. My dad purchased the island lease in 1943. Since 1965 our five children have spent each summer vacation fishing, exploring and learning how to do without television, running water and other so-called necessities. We all loved it – and still do! Today, three "Abbe" families, including numerous grandchildren, have come to appreciate the wonders of this marvelous place.

Pierce Pond is almost exactly as it was on that first trip 70 years ago. There are very few places in the world about which one can truthfully make that statement. Our entire family is grateful to the MWWT --- the Cobb family – and the many volunteers, guides and others who have made this possible.



Charlie Abbe



Carl Van Husen

## **Carl Van Husen**

### **Former Pierce Pond forester and current MWWT VP**

I was fortunate to be a forester whose responsibilities included the management of forest land in the Pierce Pond watershed. During my career there, I came to cherish certain views. One of these was sitting on the shore of Pierce Pond in Otter Pond Cove and looking across the pond to Pierce Pond Mountain. Somehow this view brought me closer to the Almighty. If I was in the area, I always tried to manage my time so I could eat lunch at this spot.

When the Trust was formed, I was asked to serve on the board but felt I had a conflict of interest. I did have a feeling that this was a special area so I tried to manage the forest land responsibly so its use by the public, sporting camps, and the landowner would be compatible. When I retired, I accepted a seat on the MWWT board. To this day, I still feel that special feeling whenever I eat lunch at the Pond and view this magnificent area.

## **Greg Drummond**

### **MWWT Caretaker/Easement Monitor and former Cobb's Camps Employee**

In the spring of 1981 Pat and I took a walk with Gary Cobb. We walked the shore around Lindsey Cove and into the yard of Cobb's Pierce Pond Camps and began a life changing adventure. I started as a dock and chore guy and Pat helped Jeanette in the kitchen. Mostly we did whatever labor that needed to be done and there was no end to it. Shortly after ice-out we moved to "camp" with most of what we needed for the summer for 2 adults, 3 kids and 2 dogs. I don't know what the Cobbs were thinking but they must have been in dire need of help. For 20 years we made this move from May to October.

No one in our family had ever lived on a lakeshore and we had no idea what a magical place it would be. This experience like any life experience was one of continuing education. Slowly I learned that the value of Pierce Pond was so much more than the resources that could be harvested. For all of us there is something in this little wild place that satisfies a spiritual need. We are like a little congregation with the watershed as our church. There are no words that can adequately define the value of MWWT and organizations like it.

### **MWWT's Good Fortune**

#### ***We're lucky that Ben Gale finally made it to Pierce Pond***

While vision, hard work and commitment are the hallmark of any successful organization often there is a bit of serendipity thrown in. MWWT's tale of good fortune dates back to the early 1960's, when Ben Gale and his wife were first married and had hoped to visit a Maine sporting camp. They had obtained a brochure from Cobb's Camps but unfortunately were never able to make the trip.



From left to right, Charlie Burnham, Dave Peppard, Ben Gale and Gary Cobb

Some 30 years later, Ben's wife came across the old Cobb's Camp brochure and shared it with Ben who decided-- better late than never--to book a stay at the Camps. Like so many others, Ben was taken with the natural beauty of the watershed. On that trip he talked with Gary and Jerry Bley (MWWT Coordinator) and asked a lot of tough questions about what the Trust hoped to accomplish. Before heading back to his home in Virginia, he let it be known that he wanted to "help out".

From that point forward, Ben, and The Gale Foundation, played a vital role in the success of MWWT's conservation endeavors. The generosity of Ben and his family foundation has provided the resources necessary for the Trust to actively pursue important conservation opportunities when they arise. Moreover, Ben's great encouragement and wisdom have been an important source of strength for the organization.

The good karma that uncovered that old brochure and brought Ben belatedly to Pierce Pond is, indeed, an important chapter in MWWT's history.

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**Continued from page 1**

- 1995: MWWT initiates its first capital fund drive and purchases 1770 acres of land along eastern edge of watershed from Central Maine Power Company.
- 1996: The Forest Legacy Program purchases a conservation easement on the recently acquired MWWT lands and also purchases a conservation easement on 6800 acres of land owned by S.D. Warren Company (now Plum Creek Timber Company). The easements prohibit all future development and guarantee traditional public access.
- 1998: Forest Legacy Program purchases additional conservation easement protection on Valentine land reducing the amount of development permitted and assuring future public access. Sappi/S.D. Warren sells all of its Maine land to Plum Creek Timber Company.
- 1999: MWWT works with the Trust for Public Land to acquire conservation easements protecting the shoreline of the Otter Ponds and 10 miles of the Dead River and Kennebec River.
- 2001: MWWT spearheads development of Backcountry Area Agreement among watershed landowners that will help preserve the remote character of the watershed by prohibiting new public access roads.
- 2002: MWWT acquires 190 acres including 1.5 miles of frontage on the Dead River. Acquiring this parcel fills an important gap resulting in the conservation of approximately 12 miles of continuous shoreline along the Dead and Kennebec Rivers in Bowtown Township and assures that no bridges will be constructed that would expand motorized access to lands east of Pierce Pond.
- 2006: MWWT acquires conservation easement on Cobb's Pierce Pond Camps property ensuring that the unique character and use of this traditional Maine sporting camp will be preserved.

In total, this array of conservation endeavors has permanently protected approximately 11,000 acres of forest land, wetlands, and mountains along with over 30 miles of pristine lake, pond, and river shoreline. Almost the entirety of the Pierce Pond watershed, including all of the outlying ponds and tributaries, will remain forever undeveloped ensuring that the water quality and habitat of these waters remains high.

Few local and regional land trusts in Maine or elsewhere can match the accomplishments of the Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust. That success is directly attributable to the passion that the Trust's leaders and members have for Pierce Pond and their undying commitment to preserve all that is special about the region. In this twentieth anniversary commemorative issue we've asked a number of folks who have played an important role in MWWT's history to share their thoughts about Pierce Pond and the work of the Trust.

Harkening back to Gary's words, the future of Pierce Pond in 2009 is a bit more certain than it was back in 1989, but still not truly secure. Even as we look back on two decades of accomplishments, the Trust is actively pursuing several new conservation opportunities that will build upon past successes and expand conservation in the Pierce Pond region.

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***"Thanks" to everyone who so generously contributed their stories, photos and recollections for the creation of this newsletter.***

***Special thanks to photographer Eric Neudel for front and back cover photos.***

***Thank you for your continued support of the Pierce Pond Watershed!***



MWWT

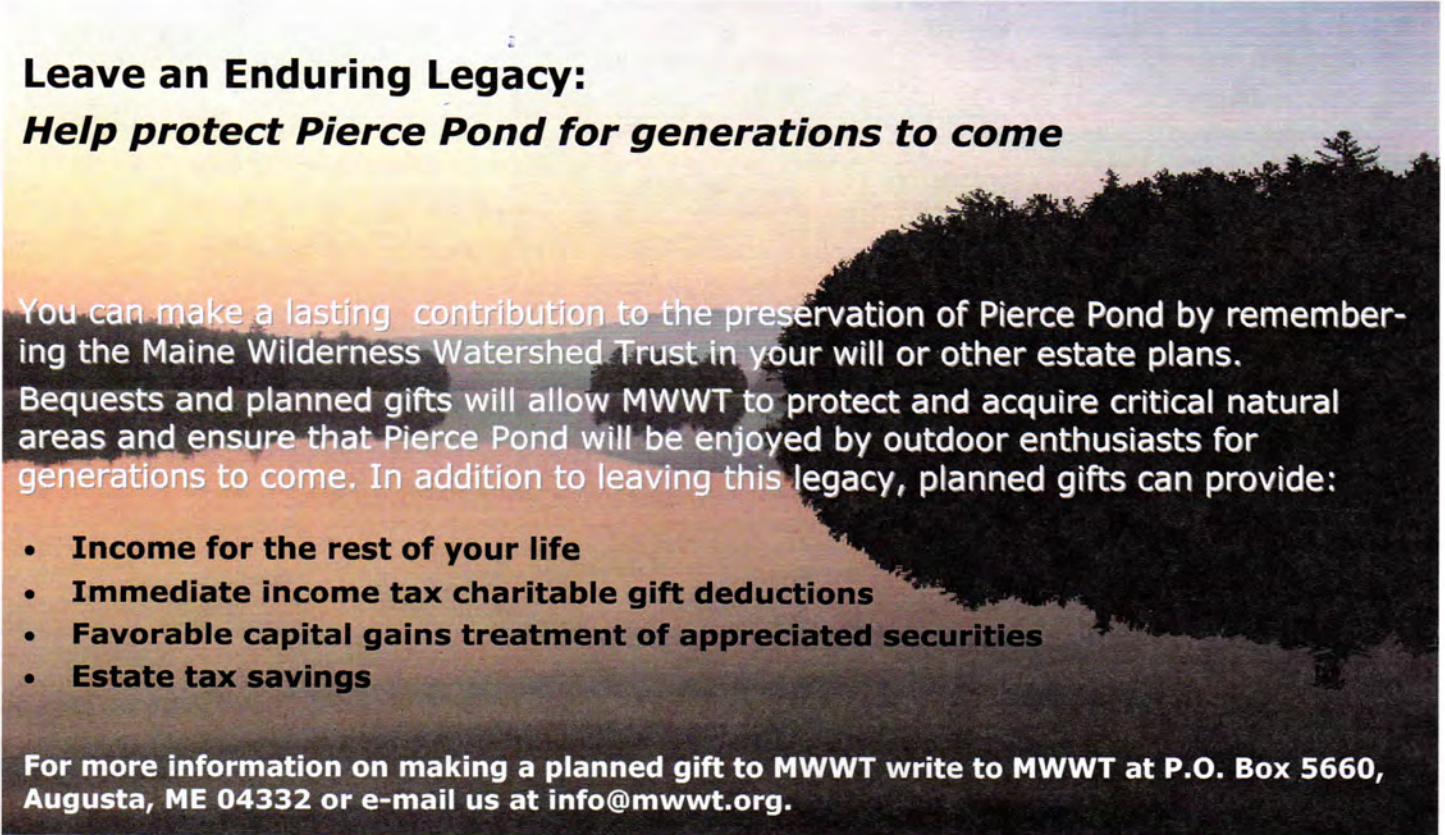
**Committed to protecting the Pierce Pond Watershed since 1989**

Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust

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**Leave an Enduring Legacy:**  
***Help protect Pierce Pond for generations to come***

You can make a lasting contribution to the preservation of Pierce Pond by remembering the Maine Wilderness Watershed Trust in your will or other estate plans.

Bequests and planned gifts will allow MWWT to protect and acquire critical natural areas and ensure that Pierce Pond will be enjoyed by outdoor enthusiasts for generations to come. In addition to leaving this legacy, planned gifts can provide:

- **Income for the rest of your life**
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**For more information on making a planned gift to MWWT write to MWWT at P.O. Box 5660, Augusta, ME 04332 or e-mail us at [info@mwwt.org](mailto:info@mwwt.org).**