

A Brief History of the Squam Creek Preserve Lands

The history of the Squam Creek Preserve land is a history of two of Westport Island's earliest settler families, the Duntons and Hodgsons. Both prominent families were, and remain, instrumental in Westport Island's history and progress.

Born in 1715, Timothy Dunton came to this area in 1735 from Sudbury Massachusetts and settled initially in Woolwich. After starting his family, he acquired land on Westport Island thru the Wiscasset Proprietors, who encouraged settlement on "Jeremisquam", as the island was known then. Timothy and his family settled by Squam Creek in about 1740, or so, and started clearing the land for his farm. His family was one of the earliest families to permanently settle on Jeremisquam. His land stretched from Squam Creek to the east, to Montsweig Bay to the west, and encompassed about 150 acres. He built his home by the entrance to Squam Creek where the "Squam Creek Farm" house now sits, which dates to about 1750.

The northern part of the Squam Creek Preserve, the land to the east of West Shore Road, is part of Timothy Dunton's original farm. Timothy's son, Daniel, acquired the land around Heal Pond, and started the tidal mill there. John Dunton, another son, settled on the east side of Jeremisquam, off of Hopkins Road.

The first parcel survey of Jeremisquam and Edgecomb was done in 1815. The survey was ordered by Massachusetts in order to settle land grant title disputes among the various competing proprietors from colonial times. The surveyor, Stephen Parsons, identified the Dunton parcel as "Lot 1" on Jeremisquam. By 1815, Timothy Dunton's land had passed to grandson Andrew Dunton, who was a sailor. Unfortunately, Andrew was lost at sea in 1829 and his land was divided between cousins Hartley, who was given the land that is now Squam Creek Farm, and Stephen, who was given the land that is now part of the preserve. Stephen built a house near where West Shore Road now passes. Remnants of the house remain. When his daughter, Eliza Jane came of age and wanted to marry, Stephen granted her a small parcel (116' by 116') in 1865 for her house at the southern end of his land. Likewise, when his son James came of age, he was granted, in 1876, a small parcel (187' by 144') near Stephen's house. The beautifully made foundations of those early homes are well preserved. The Dunton cemetery on the preserve land honors Stephen's family, and is well maintained by the Westport Island Cemetery Committee.

The southern part of Squam Creek Preserve is land that was settled by members of the Hodgdon family, who arrived on Jeremisquam not long after Timothy Dunton's family settled. In the 1815 survey, the land was owned by John Hodgdon, and was identified as "Lot 2" on Jeremisquam. The foundation of the Hodgdon home site is well preserved, as are an extensive pattern of stonewalls and livestock enclosure foundations that are fascinating and beautifully constructed. Little is known about the uses of all stonework, but it fun to imagine the functioning farm and homesteads. Luretta Hodgdon is thought to be the last member of the family living on the property. She passed away in 1940 at 90 years of age. The well maintained Hodgdon cemetery near her home site honors this branch of the Hodgdon family.

It is not surprising that the earliest families found this land ideal for their farms. The soil is productive – among the best on the island, and Squam Creek's salt hay made excellent feed for their livestock and the creek's wetlands provided fish, shellfish and fowl for their families.

Since 1959, the Segerstrom family has gently cared for the land.