

Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Spring 2009

Memories of Spring on Spy Pond: Now and Then

by Uta Low



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

Spring was definitely knocking at the door. I was awakened early in the morning, around 5 am by the most beautiful birdsong right next to my window. I jumped out of bed together with my Abyssinian and Siamese cats, Zimba and Solomon, and we pressed our ears against the wall close to the open window, but not too close to scare the bird away. He did not let himself be disturbed and sang and sang the most beautiful welcoming song to Spring, to the reawakening of the Earth, to budding trees and sunlit skies. He also sang to snow bells pushing their heads through the snow, the first emerging daffodils, deep blue and golden colored crocuses, and a few most unusual, dwarf, porcelain-like, grayish-blue irises cluttered together in a circle, as if holding each other tightly for fear Master Frost might still be hiding behind closed doors.

I saw trees burst into buds, the first ones carrying a shaft of deep crimson flower-like buds, followed by the weeping willows with delicate, slender, pale-green leaflets and drooping pollens. Each day appeared more and more shades of green-yellowish, brownish, pale, medium and deep, painted in patches around the Pond. All sorts of sprouting greens were pushing their tips through the earth in Spy Pond Park: curly ferns, delicate stalks of wild asters, the first signs of the greens of goldenrods, clover climbing across the ground and here and there the closed shaft of a dandelion and the green foliage of orange lilies.

(Continued on page 2)

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Spring is here and Spy Pond Park is already blooming. We all anticipate the full glory of Spy Pond Park by the glimmering waters of Spy Pond. Once again, we have designated Work Days in the Park so that it will be properly maintained. We will contact people who have indicated they would be willing to volunteer their time and energy. I hope to see more people coming to clean up, spread mulch, prune, and weed once again. Please consider joining us. You can also participate in boating on Spy Pond by signing up in advance through Arlington's Recreation Department to reserve a boat on the last Friday of each month. We will post information concerning this when it becomes available. We all look forward to enjoying the Park and the Pond once again.

As Town Meeting begins, we encourage our district representatives to approve the portion of the annual budget proposed by the Parks and Recreation Department. It includes money that would be used for a new playground surface planned to eliminate the problem of sand wasp infestation that occurs every year. We will continue to pursue an efficient way to curb erosion of the path through the Park. There is much to do to keep Spy Pond Park looking great.

Thanks to the many Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP) members who have contributed articles for this newsletter. It is wonderful to have so many people reaching out to others in so personal a way. If you have an idea for our summer newsletter, please contact Eric Berger at berkshire2@juno.com. Your input about topics related to Spy Pond Park can provide education and entertainment for our many readers.

Finally, we will soon be sending out our annual solicitation for your membership. Your dues and donations help support what we do. We ask that you give serious consideration to being part of our efforts by paying FSPP membership dues and giving your time to get involved in one of the many projects that will be happening to keep Spy Pond Park beautiful. Thank you, as always, for your interest in our worthy endeavors.

Sincerely,
Karen L. Grossman
FSPP President

(Memories, continued)

And then there is the wildlife on and around the Pond. I have lived on the Pond for 38 years, walked, run, bicycled and swum around it. I've also swum to Elizabeth Island twice daily, sailed and canoed on the Pond and have always encountered all sorts of wildlife. There used to be numerous loons on the Pond early in the season. One could hear their eerie loony call echoing across the lake. There were wood-hens, hawks, many more ducks, skunk families with little ones. (I saw skunk family members in the middle of the night from my balcony, the white in their fur brightly reflecting in the moonlight, winding their way in a straight line, undulating like a large snake in and out of the bushes that were their hiding ground, then crossing the lawn and disappearing into the bushes on the other side of the next building.) I once surprised a family of raccoons on its nightly excursion. Even a hedgehog family came visiting numerous times. Snapping turtles pushed their heads out of the water and big fish jumped fearlessly high. Blue herons and egrets have ventured from the Great Meadows in Concord and stood lifelessly still to stalk suddenly with quick and utmost precision after a gliding fish. A very tame muskrat, called Abercrombe, a friend of many, was housed here for decades, living under the roots of a knotted tree along the shoreline, gathering grass in bushels for his nest. He would pick the soft cover right next to your hand if you held still enough. I saw a weasel once, too.

I've heard mockingbirds call to one another across the rooftops of different buildings in the middle of the night, imitating either any sound the mate on the rooftop of the other building made or another species of bird or a human voice to distract or mock him. Also, a nightingale woke me repeatedly with its beautiful song. Amazingly for New England, beautifully colored hummingbirds have come and dove their delicate long pointed beaks into the shaft of my petunias on the balcony. And two red robin

couples had their nests in my hanging geraniums every summer for many years. They laid their eggs and hatched their young ones there, at one point seven of them. The parents flew back and forth laboriously to fetch food for their nestlings, balancing it carefully into bright yellow bottomless open beaks for weeks. Later they taught them how to fly, outdoing any acrobat.

The other day, sitting at the picnic table in the early morning, I saw a little beautifully shaped, reddish-brown colored rabbit graze on the lawn, perfectly poised, still like a statue, gazing at me. He must have been that motionless way for half an hour with only his little whiskers and snout vibrating, reminding me of an Albrecht Durer sketch. Suddenly, a rattling noise from the parking lot carried over, and he disappeared. Another time I sat on my balcony and noticed Mr. Swan had categorically taken over more than half the Pond area for himself, Mrs. Swan and two cygnets. He harassed Mother Wild Goose and her 6 goslings into despair. They were dispersed and could not get back together. He was vicious in his attack on them, isolating the mother and young ones systematically and attacking the little ones who had hidden in the bushes. He was going to kill them. I took a broom, went downstairs and banged it hard and loud on the railing of the dock to distract him. (I broke my \$16 broom, a major expense in the defense of wild goose life.) I opened the gate for the goslings to escape and for the mother to hide on the neighboring baseball-field lawn. Returning to my balcony, I observed the little ones gathering on the lawn. It took over two hours until they found a hole in the fence surrounding the baseball field and were able to reunite with mother goose, with none of the baby geese hurt. Somewhat later they escaped to the other side of the Pond never to be seen again on this side. And Emperor Swan proudly promenaded Empress Swan and his two cygnets alongside his newly conquered territory.

One final Spy Pond memory involved my neighbor who found a baby squirrel which had fallen out of its nest. She nurtured it into adulthood. It became amazingly tame and she let it back into the wild when it had sufficiently grown. Later, when she called it by name it would come, climb up her legs, onto her arms, eat nuts out of her hand and turn over onto its back and let her caress its belly. One day she called, but it did not return.

These are some of my memories of Spy Pond. I am sure more will come as I continue living here. This closeness to the beauties and mysteries of nature is what we all enjoy and try to preserve, beauties like the soothing and spectacular sunsets and sunrises across the Pond peacefully lulling us to sleep in the evenings and waking us with hope in the mornings- reminding us that, despite life's travails and occasional sorrows, there is not only much beauty in the world if we watch closely enough but also joy and rejuvenation.



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

2009 Work Schedule*

Saturday, April 25, 1-4 pm
Weeding, pruning and cleanup

Saturday, May 2, 1-4 pm
Mulching, need more help

Saturday, May 16, 1-4 pm
Mulching, need more help

Saturday, June 20, 1-4 pm**
Weeding, pruning and cleanup

Saturday, July 18, 10 am-1 pm
Weeding, pruning and cleanup

Saturday, August 15, 10 am-1 pm
Weeding, pruning and cleanup

Saturday, September 15, 10 am-1 pm**
Weeding and cleanup

Saturday, October 17, 1-4 pm
Fall Cleanup

*Please mark your calendars now. Contact Ilse Oliveira at 781-646-9332 to volunteer. Bring gloves and gardening tools, if you have them. Meet at the playground at the Pond Lane end of the Park. In case of inclement weather, we'll meet on the next day, Sunday. Check our website, friendsofspypondpark.org for notices in regard to this.

**Suggestions for activities in the Park for children and adults are welcome.

Weed Treatment Planned For Spy Pond

by Elizabeth Karpati

The weeds are rearing their ugly heads again after being beaten down in 2001 and 2009. The third treatment with the herbicide "Sonar" is being planned for May 2009. This chemical works by interfering with photosynthesis, in effect starving the weeds by keeping them from making use of the nutrients available in the Pond. It does not harm fish, birds, or mammals, including humans, which do not photosynthesize.

Since Spy Pond has no river flowing through it, nutrients that get into the Pond pretty much stay there, constantly recycled from decaying into newly growing weeds. The annual "fertilizer flier" distributed throughout the watershed by the Spy Pond Committee asks people to be careful with fertilizer and not use the high-phosphorus kind. Avoiding runoff from such fertilizer

can keep the situation from getting worse, but can't make it better, so periodic weed control is a necessity. And the weeds have no respect for the budget cycle. They must be attacked at the right stage of growth for the treatment to be effective, but any money appropriated by Town Meeting in a given year comes too late to be useful in that year.

Recognizing this, Town Meeting in 2006 passed a warrant article establishing a permanent fund for monitoring and periodic treatment of all of Arlington's water bodies. This required state approval, but the article got temporarily lost in the legislative labyrinth. Approval finally came through in 2008, so now we have a fund that can work like the "balanced billing" plan offered by utility companies that allows customers to spread out their heating costs throughout the year. Annual appropriations can accumulate while the weeds are still recovering from the last treatment, and then be available when needed to "sock it to them" at the time when it does the most good, while Town Meeting is working on the appropriations for the next fiscal year.

We owe thanks to Town Meeting for establishing this fund, and we express the hope that they will vote money for it again this year, because the money in it now will be wiped out in May by the treatment needed to keep Spy Pond from becoming really weed-choked this summer.

5th Annual Spy Pond Trails Day: May 9, 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Please join us for a few hours of spring cleaning along the path that parallels Route 2, between Lake St. and Pleasant St., Arlington. This will be our fifth year doing trail maintenance, controlling invasive plants, pruning vistas, trash pick up, and generally improving this scenic slice of public land. All equipment and snacks will be provided. Event is hosted by the Spy Pond Environment Task Group, a Vision 2020 committee made up of volunteers working in partnership with the town and a multitude of civic, sports, youth, and social organizations. C'mon down and join the party, rain or shine! Participants should bring sturdy footwear, work clothes, water, hat and sunscreen, rain gear. Liability waivers will be available and must be signed by all participants (under 18 need approval from—and are preferably accompanied by—a parent or guardian). Recommended parking: exit 60 off Rt. 2, head towards Mass. Ave. (N) on Lake St., first left onto Colonial Drive, left onto Roanoke, left and park along Spy Pond Parkway. For further details, call (781) 641-2506, or visit our website: <http://spypond.arlington.ma.us/>.

Archeological Wonders Enrich Spy Pond Clean-Up Day

by Eva Balazs

CLEAN-UP DAY on Spy Pond! Actually, it's much more than that! It's practicing archeology! It's doing the Big Dig! Just think of past discoveries, of all the things reclaimed from the depths of Spy Pond: bicycles, baby carriages, refrigerators, at least one bathtub, two cars. And how about the prehistoric mastodon tusk that Arvid Carlson found in three feet deep water? And the Indian arrowheads the Kantrowits girls found near their beach? And what about the bulldozer that fell into the Pond when Route 2 was built? That huge equipment disappeared without a trace. It is still there, somewhere. And tell me what happened to the three muskets the British soldiers threw into the water as they were chased by Mother Batherick? Where are those muskets? Nobody found them. Not yet!

There is a mystery around here, let me tell you! The name itself, "Spy", suggests secrecy! Did you know, for example, that until not so long ago Spy Pond was connected to the harbor and the ocean via Alewife Brook and Mystic River? And legend has it that sometimes pirate ships sailed up in search of a sheltered hiding place in our lake, which was a much larger body of water then and was called Spie Lake.

Well, as I said, there is a mystery around here. By all means come and join the clean-up team in April...you will be among archeologists and historians.

Garry Carlson's Dad Thought Something Wasn't Quite Right

by Eric Berger

Arvid Carlson loved to fish. It was the summer of 1959 and one morning, as told to me recently by Arvid's son, Garry, his father was casting his fishing line in the shallow waters of Spy Pond to the right of where the Boys and Girls Club building is now located. Arvid was annoyed, however, because he kept hooking what he believed was a large sunken branch of a weeping willow tree. Finally Arvid lugged the "branch" out of the water and stared at it. He kept staring at it. Something wasn't quite right.

Arvid and Garry's older brother dragged the object to their nearby house and rested it on their front lawn. Garry's mother looked out and wondered what the heck was going on. Arvid tried cutting the object but it wouldn't cut. He tried again but still no luck. He stared at it. Something wasn't quite right.

A few days passed and Arvid summoned some scientists to his home to help unravel the mystery. The scientists were able to slice away a piece and took it for analysis. Imagine the amazement of the Carlson family upon learning Arvid had hooked a mastodon tusk residing in Spy Pond for 43,000 years!

The next summer brought eager scuba divers to Spy Pond. They combed the waters, especially where Arvid had been fishing that memorable summer morning, but found nothing. Arvid made sure the general public could view the mastodon tusk, however, for he signed it over to the Boston Museum of Science. The tusk even traveled to Washington where it was displayed for about ten years at the Smithsonian Institute. The intriguing tusk can now be viewed at the George A. Smith Museum located at 7 Jason Street in Arlington.

Lore depicts fishermen sharing tales of huge fish they almost caught. Garry quite aptly titles the amazing "fish" story of his father's catch of the mastodon tusk as "The Big One That Didn't Get Away".

Ice-Cutting on Spy Pond

by Eric Berger

Skaters flashed across the icy surface of Spy Pond this past winter, but back in the 1840s the biggest business in Arlington was ice-cutting. According to Eva Balazs, in her fine book, *More Spy Pond Stories*, "In a good year, 150,000 tons of ice were cut on Spy Pond and shipped all over the world."

Ice storehouses stood along the Pond, the oldest of which was on Pond Lane. To fill these storehouses, ice-cutting, or ice-harvesting as it was called, began as the workers and horses strode onto the Pond. The cutting was done by hand and, as Eva writes, "At times 200-300 men and 150 horses were out on the Pond." WOW! The harvesting began with the cutting of huge ice blocks which were then cut into 250 pound chunks. These mammoth pieces were further prepared either for storage or shipping.

"Ice that was meant for storage", writes Eva, "was dragged to the ice houses, and the blocks were hoisted into the barns. Packed between layers of straw, and sawdust, ice was preserved for as long as two years." Two years!

What happened when the Pond did not freeze enough or the season was much too short for enough ice-cutting? Ice was imported into Spy Pond by train from New Hampshire! Where were the destinations of so much of our Spy Pond ice? Loaded in Boston on the fastest moving vessels of the day, sleek clipper ships, our ice was, as Eva recounts, "packed below water level between layers of straw and sawdust" and sent as far away as "South America, the West Indies, India, China and Australia." Can you imagine sending tons of ice in 1840 from Boston to China and the ice arriving unmelted? Talk about "What can Brown do for you?"

Calling All Packrats!

FSPP wants to establish a couple of complete files of past newsletters.

If you have any issue **NOT** listed below, or a spare copy of the ones that are starred, please contact Elizabeth (781-643-4172 or ekarpati@juno.com). Thanks!

| | |
|------|-------------------------------|
| 2000 | *Feb, May, *Summer |
| 2001 | *Feb. |
| 2002 | *Winter, Spring, *Fall |
| 2003 | *Winter 02-03, *Summer, *Fall |
| 2004 | *Spring, *Fall |
| 2005 | *Spring, Fall |
| 2006 | Jan, April, Fall |
| 2007 | Feb, Summer, Fall |

SPRING PLANTING

by Peggy Fenner

(Here's a poem especially for children, one parents can enjoy reading to and with them.)

Each Spring we plant seeds,
It's amazing to watch them grow.
But how they grow roots, stems and leaves
is something I don't yet know.
Hmmm.....
It seems to be the dirt
that I think a lot about.
'Cause how does this crumbly brown stuff
that's so good for diggin' in tunnels and makin' mud pies
get little plants to sprout?

ECOFEST

by Ilse Oliveira

On Saturday, March 28, 2009, a sunny, spring-like day, ECOFEST took place at Arlington Town Hall. I represented the FSPP at the Fest with the help of Elizabeth Karpati. Eric Baatz also assisted by stopping by with some FSPP T-shirts, and I sold three. The Fest was sponsored by the Arlington Garden Club which provided delicious pastries and coffee, the Public Works Department, Conservation Commission and Vision 2020.

There were a lot of tables from a variety of interest groups, including The Backyard Hens of Arlington, Vermont Natural Ag Products, Eco Friendly Smart BarrelZ and The Derby Farm. Most of the groups represented at the Fest were geared towards organic and eco friendly solutions and ideas. We shared our table with Vision 2020 and its very interesting project at the Reservoir.

David Epstein, landscape designer, talked about landscape alternatives and provided an interesting outlook on how to change or keep a lawn to be more natural without pesticides. Organic alternatives like corn gluten for crab grass, milky spores for grubs, liquid copper fungicide, calcium rather than lime and organic compost can be substituted. David has a website, "GrowingWisdom.com", with many useful ideas and suggestions. One can sign up for a monthly newsletter at his website and he has over 300 garden videos.

Regarding the history of lawns, David mentioned the idea of lawns originated in England in the 40's and 50's and people were looking for the "perfect lawn". Now eighty percent of private households have lawns and \$40 billion is spent on them each year. The average lawn size is one-third of an acre. Recently, lawns frame a garden and are for play surfaces. Grass is labor-intense to maintain and costly. Alternatives are sedges, barren strawberry, low growing thyme, bearberry, bunchberry, low type cotoneaster, Microbiota (does not need a lot of sun), Epimedium and carpet rose. In short, one can look for native ground covers. Regarding mulch, use neutral varieties, for dead mulch does not have any nutrients. Mulch alternatives are sea weed (free on the beach), salt marsh, hay, straw or an organic mix. Create lawn walkways or areas covered with pea stone, river stone or mulch. Regarding watering, water before 8am in the morning, not evening, thoroughly (3/4-1") twice a week.

Many people came to ECOFEST and interacted and stopped at our table (which displayed THE goose with the "Do not feed the geese" sign) sharing positive comments. A few people took our FSPP newsletters and one person signed up for some work days. All in all, ECOFEST was a success.



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

**Friends of Spy Pond Park
next meeting
at
Karen Grossman's
Sunday, May 10, 2009
7:00 p.m.
32 Hamilton Road #402**

RSVP (optional) to 781-646-5990
email karen@klgwoman.com

Park on Linwood Street off Mass. Ave. or on Lakehill off
Lake St. at the far end of the complex.

To join Friends of Spy Pond Park...

Send your annual dues (\$15 individual, \$25 household, \$5 low-income) to:
FSPP, P.O. Box 1051
Arlington, MA 02474-0021

For more information, call a Friends officer.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
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